

TRUE JESUS CHURCH

Manna

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Lost at Sea

Finding Your Other Half

TJC Internet Report

Knowing

God's Will





ENDURING IN HOPE

It is easy to think that the saintly characters in the Bible never experienced any problems in their lives.

FF Chong--London, UK



In our minds, we picture them as super-humans living a constant, high level of spirituality, with unceasing joy and strong hope in God. With these assumptions, we may admire or even envy them. But our perception couldn't be further from the truth. In reality, these biblical figures were often completely downhearted, and God's will often appeared very distant to them. How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever?

How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? (Ps 13:1-2)

Does this prayer sound familiar to the ones we utter when we feel that we have no one and nowhere to turn to? In fact, these words uttered by David paint a picture of deep despair and wretchedness beyond anything most of us will ever experience.

Despair does not find its way only to the less successful. It comes to all. Even the great apostle Paul was no exception; outstanding and spiritual as he was in divine work and character, Paul was as human as we are. "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life" (2 Cor 1:8). Paul was downcast probably because of the riot and the chronic opposition he encountered in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-

41). This was but one of the many life-threatening situations that he encountered during his missionary journeys.

FIXING OUR EYES ON JESUS CHRIST

Even so, Paul shared with the Christians of Corinth his secret of how his faith remained firm in times of unbearable distress and trials: Paul knew that God was in control of all circumstances. Throughout his life, Paul realized that there was nothing he could do to help himself. In light of his knowledge of Jesus Christ and His will, Paul trusted in God and praised Him at all times (2 Cor 1:3-7). Likewise, the apostle Peter wrote to

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the believers in the midst of trials, praising God for the future blessings and a living hope that were in store for those who endured (1 Pet 1:3-9).

*There are many who say,
"Who will show us any good?"
LORD, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us.
You have put gladness in my heart,
More than in the season that their grain and wine increased.
I will both lie down in peace, and sleep;
For You alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety. (Ps 4:6-8)*

This psalmist proclaims that God, and nothing else, is our true

protection in time of danger. Paul also relied on the Lord Jesus through every trial, knowing that He was his only hope (1 Tim 1:1). Christ alone gave him the strength he required to continue his ministry, and this strength enabled him to face trials rather than avoid them. With God's word and His divine presence in his life, Paul could face the most adverse situation in which he found himself. "We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor 4:8-9).

When we become discouraged because of difficulties, sufferings, or tribulations in life, our natural reaction is to focus on these external circumstances. Instead, we should look upon our Lord Jesus and try to understand what God wants us to learn and do during these troubling times.

TRUST, HUMILITY, AND PERSEVERANCE

Trust. We can prepare ourselves to face all kinds of difficulties by keeping in mind that every trial is beneficial to those who love God (Rom 8:28). Part of trusting in God is knowing that He will never let us suffer beyond what we can endure (1 Cor 10:13). Paul once beseeched the Lord three times to remove "a thorn in his flesh," but Christ answered him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:7-9). In effect, the Lord was telling Paul that he would receive no more of His grace, nor did he need more. Christ's grace is suffi-



cient in that it does not banish weakness, but it allows us to overcome it if we are willing to rely on His power completely.

Humility. To bear our trials in life, we must also show humility before God and admit to Him that we are weak and need His help. Our experiences in life or work for God should not prevent us from humbling ourselves before Him. In Paul's experience, he knew that when he felt weak, he became strong (2 Cor 12:10). It is precisely when we feel weak that God endues His power on us. Conversely, if we think that we are invincible or standing on firm ground, we are in danger of failing miserably (1 Cor 10:12).

Perseverance. During times of difficulty, we may wonder when God will deliver us. We need to remember that God will deliver us in His own time, and it may not be immediately. For example, the Jews were held in captivity for seventy years, and David was pursued by Saul for the main part of his early life.

In addition, the methodology that God deploys may sometimes surprise us. Take the example of Stephen in Acts 7. As Stephen was being stoned to death, God revealed Himself to him and freed him from the excruciating suffering that the unbelieving Jews were inflicting upon him (Acts 7:54-60).

We do not know when God will deliver us from our tribulations, but what we do know is that His deliverance is certain and will be in response to our faith and prayers, in

His own time and in His own way. "I sought the LORD, and He heard me, And delivered me from all my fears" (Ps 34:4).

BENEFITS OF SUFFERING

The most meaningful and valuable service that we can give to our Lord Jesus is to glorify Him in every aspect of our lives, whether we are living in joy or in suffering. If we are able to pass through suffering in a God-fearing manner, His name will be glori-

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we most need God ourselves, we reveal the genuine love of God.

Our suffering is beneficial because it purifies us from sin and molds our character into what is needed for His work. "Therefore since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God" (1 Pet 4:1-2). By drawing near to the Lord day by day, we faithfully await His salvation when He comes again.

The strength to endure is a mark of Christian maturity as well as a living hope in Christ. As we endure suffering, we

must fix our gaze upon our Lord Jesus and try to understand His purpose for us. Since God is in control of all circumstances, we should put our trust in Him. This means submitting ourselves humbly under His mighty hand, believing that God uses all circumstances for the edification of those who love Him, and understanding that He may use suffering to accomplish His will. Let us be prepared to allow Him to shape us, enabling us to work mightily for His name, and ultimately to lead us to salvation. ★

Lost at Sea

I am a Naval Officer serving in the Malaysian Navy. I would like to testify about the grace of our Lord Jesus, who saved me from death in the ocean off the northwest coast of Sabah, Malaysia.

Khailashkumar s/o Jeganathan—Kampong Koh, Sitiawan, Perak, MALAYSIA

On November 3, 1999, I was on board the KD Lembing naval ship traveling from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, to Sandakan. About five miles from the coast, I suddenly found myself in the tempestuous sea. It was about 11:00 P.M., and worse still, I was without a life jacket!

The water was cold and it was raining on and off. The wind was very strong and the waves were about three to four meters high. I could see the stern light of my ship a long distance away, and I knew that the crew on board would not be able to hear me if I yelled for help. Looking around, I saw a light from a beacon that was miles away on the mainland of Sabah.

For the next two hours or so, I tried to swim toward the beacon, but I made little progress because of the

bad weather and strong side current. I was unable to swim very fast because of cramps in both my thighs. Also, I could feel jellyfish stinging me, which was extremely painful. In fact, all kinds of fish were hitting against my body. The feeling was extremely scary, but I tried my best to push them away and continue swimming. The area where I fell overboard was well known for sharks, and this knowledge was certainly not very comforting.

After about two hours, I realized that I could never reach the mainland. The waves were much bigger now, and because I was already exhausted, I felt like sinking into the sea. I started to pray, crying to the Lord for help. Each time I held my hands together to pray I would sink into the water. I was feeling very

drowsy by then and didn't know what I was doing. I was becoming too exhausted to think of anything. These feelings got worse as the temperature of the water began to drop.

At one point, I wanted to give up the struggle. I held my head down in the water hoping to faint and drown. But I knew that by doing so I would be committing suicide, which is a mortal sin. I also thought of my father and some church members in Kampong Koh, and how heartbroken they would be if I died. I just could not accept the fact that they would be crying for me. So I kept on shouting "Hallelujah" and pressed on. I also remembered that the Lord Jesus once asked His disciples, "Why are you afraid of the storms and the sea, you men of little faith?"

Later, I don't know what happened, but I seemed to fall into a deep sleep or something.

THE NEXT DAY

The next thing I knew, it was day-break and the sun's rays were hurting my eyes. At first I could not even open them, and the salt water made them more painful. When at last I was able to open my eyes, I realized that I was in the open ocean. There was no land in sight. Despite this, I felt very grateful to the Lord for delivering me from danger and keeping me safe throughout the night.

I gathered strength and kept on swimming. Fish were jumping in front of my eyes. They were Tenggoris fish, with sharp teeth, and I was really terrified! I tried to avoid them and kept on swimming. Suddenly, I saw a fishing boat pass in front of me. I tried my very best to swim nearer to it, but none of the crew could see me or hear my cries for help. After chasing the boat, I was very, very exhausted. I was out of breath and very dis-

appointed that all my struggle had been wasted.

After about two or three hours I saw an island very, very far away, but I did not think that I could reach it because it was so far away, about fifteen miles (25 km). Moreover, it was raining and the early morning temperature was very cold. Still, I didn't have any choice but to keep swimming in order to keep myself warm. I realized that I had blisters all over my face and body. The pain was excruciating. Due to excessive intake and exposure to salt water, my throat and nose were swollen and hurt terribly.

It was undeniably the merciful and loving hand of the Lord that delivered me from the stormy sea, just as He had sent a fish to swallow Jonah and then vomit him onto the shore of Nineveh.

My tongue also felt very rough, and I could not taste anything.

Finally, I made up my mind that if I wanted to survive I would have to swim toward the island. The journey took me from morning till evening. I swam against the waves, into the waves, and on top of the waves, trying to stay alive.

Hallelujah, all thanks be to our Most High God and Savior! I reached the island at about 6 P.M. I was extremely happy and thankful.

As I walked on the beach, I fell and stumbled along the way because I was very hungry and thirsty, as well as exhausted and shivering in the cold. I saw a wooden house with three men outside. They were staring at me, too shocked for words. I opened my mouth to ask for food and a place to sleep, but no sound came out. Only then did I realize that I couldn't speak, so I had to use gestures to make myself understood.

The men brought me to another location on the island by motorboat. It was the home of the Ketua Kampung (the village chief), who provided me with food and a place

to sleep. Thank God, I was in good hands.

GIVING THANKS

After sleeping through the whole night like a log, I was taken to a small clinic on the island early the next morning. There I found out that I was on Banggi Island, near the Philippines border.

Later I went to the police station. After making a police report, I made a phone call to the naval authorities, and after about thirty minutes, a Nuri helicopter arrived to take me to the mainland of Sabah, to a town called Kudat. I was immediately admitted into the Kudat Hospital.

After about three hours in the hospital, I sneaked out and went to Kudat church to thank the Lord. It happened that Kudat church was having a spiritual meeting, and I took the opportunity to testify to the brethren there about how the Lord had saved me.

Looking back, I know that no one could have survived this whole ordeal at sea without divine help. In all, I was in the stormy sea for about twenty hours! It was impossible that I could swim the thirty miles (50 km) to Banggi Island without God's help. Although the Malaysian Navy had sent five naval warships, four Nuri helicopters, one seaplane, and two Marine-Police ships, they could not locate me.

It was undeniably the merciful and loving hand of the Lord that delivered me from the stormy sea and guided me to the island of Banggi, just as He had sent a fish to swallow Jonah and then vomit him onto the shore of Nineveh.

Hallelujah! May all praise and glory be to the Lord! Amen. ★



Hallelujah, in the name of the Lord Jesus I testify. My name is Max Tauran, and I was born in 1958. I am from Ambon City, the capital of Molucca Island in East Indonesia, where the majority of the indigenous people are Christians. I would like to share with you how my family and I became members of the True Jesus Church.

The Lord

As with most Ambonese families, my parents brought us up with Christian values. In Ambon City, I attended the Molucca Protestant Church until 1979, when five friends and I left for Jakarta (the capital of Indonesia) in search of a better life. Our limited education, however, prevented us from finding proper jobs in Jakarta. We ended up joining a local gang that used force to make a living. Thus, in order to survive in Jakarta, we began this kind of life.

THE TRUTH IN THE BIBLE

Thank God for preventing me from falling any deeper into the devil's snare. One day I met an old friend named Chris, who discussed the truth and salvation with me. Although I told him that I had already joined a church in Jakarta, he kept coming to my house, just to talk about God's laws as written in the Bible. As we agreed that the truth was crucial in leading us to eternal life (Jn 8:51), we decided to have regular Bible studies at my house.

Several months later, we summarized the conclusions of our Bible studies into several important points:

- 1) *The church must be founded according to the Bible; not a single word in the Bible shall be added or taken away (Rev 22:18-19).*
- 2) *The church has to keep the seventh day holy; this day is Saturday, the Sabbath day (Ex 20:8-11; Mk 2:27; Mt 28:1).*
- 3) *The church has to perform baptism in living water (1 Cor 10:2) and in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:5-6).*
- 4) *The church has to conduct the sacraments of Holy Communion (Jn 6:53-56) and Footwashing (Jn 13:8).*
- 5) *The church has to have the Holy Spirit's abidance (Jn 20:21-23; Rom 8:9).*

SEARCHING FOR THE RIGHT CHURCH

Based on this knowledge, we decided not to attend services at any church that kept Sunday as the Sabbath day. We began our search for a church that kept the truth wholeheartedly. We visited numerous churches, and each time, we would ask about the church's beliefs and the background of its leaders. But our search was futile. We could not find a single church that followed the truth based on the conclusions we had reached from our months of Bible studies. We did not give up, however, because we continued to believe in what the Lord Jesus had said to Peter: "and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of

Directed me in Seeking the Truth

Max Tauran—Molucca Island, EAST INDONESIA

Jesus had said to Peter: “and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Mt 16:18).

Three years passed. We still could not find this church. Later, we had an idea and decided to contact the Jews in Israel. One of our friends suggested that we approach the U.S. Embassy. To my delight, at the U.S. Embassy library I found details of one fellowship that called itself “Jews for Jesus,” based in San Francisco, California, USA.

We were very happy and immediately wrote to this group, asking whether they would come to Indonesia to teach and baptize us. But their answer was disappointing. They told us that although they preached the gospel throughout the world, their target was only the dispersed Jews. After that, we began to feel desperate, since it looked as if there was no more hope for us to find the truth.

FINDING THE LORD’S FLOCK— AT LAST

Thanks to the Lord Jesus for His faithfulness. He never ignores His people who are really looking for Him. And at last, He reached out His hands to us. One day, as we were holding Sabbath fellowship at the

house of one of Chris’s friends, Chris told us something that would change our lives. He said that he went to the Department of Religious Affairs, asking for a permit to open a new church that would keep Saturday as the Sabbath day. But the person in charge of Christian Affairs at the

To our surprise, what we had concluded from our own Bible studies, all the important topics, were present in the True Jesus Church! We had found it!

Department told him: “Why do you want to open a new church? Why don’t you join services held at the True Jesus Church, which is located near Pasar Baru Street? They also keep Sabbath Day on Saturday.” This was the first time we had heard about the True Jesus Church.

The very next day, we went to the True Jesus Church. We asked the resident minister about the truth and the church’s background. To our surprise, what we had concluded from our own Bible studies, all the important topics, were present in this church! We had found it! No words could express how glad we felt at that time! Thanks to the Lord Jesus for leading us to His grace!

We continued to join the

Sabbath services and attended numerous Bible studies at the True Jesus Church in Jakarta. Finally, on August 9, 1992, four of us Christians from another flock received baptism and became members of the True Jesus Church.

Beloved brethren, we believe that what we had experienced was arranged by God! He is the Good Shepherd, leading His lambs to green pasture (Mt 5:6; Jn 7:37). Praise the Lord that since then, my wife and our five children

have also received baptism in the True Jesus Church. I hope that this testimony can encourage the hearts of those who are looking for the truth and eternal life. May all glory be given to our Lord Jesus! Hallelujah. Amen. ☆



Bro. Max Tauran



Peace in the Lord

Fritz Chen—Toronto, Ontario, CANADA

Hallelujah! In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I testify. I am currently a member of the True Jesus Church in Toronto, Canada. In 1993, when I was still living in Taiwan, I underwent surgery to remove a cancerous tumor in my stomach (gastric lymphoma). The doctor first proposed to remove my whole stomach and then have me undergo chemotherapy. But as it turned out, the doctor removed only four-fifths of my stomach. And to my surprise, I didn't need to go through chemotherapy after the operation because the tumor turned out to be benign. Thank God, the doctors told me I was healthy. A year later I was reexamined, and everything was still fine. About that time, I decided to immigrate to Canada.

A DIFFICULT DECISION

In February 1998 my stomach problems recurred, and I was sent to the hospital. My condition was a lot more serious this time. For a long time I could not eat because the tumor took up so much space in my stomach. I was spitting out substantial amounts of blood and lost a lot of weight. I was virtually skin and bones. When brothers and sisters came to visit me, they could not help but cry for me because I looked like I was on the brink of death.

The doctors recommended that I should not undergo surgery because I was too weak and it would have been too risky to operate. They suggested that instead I skip directly to chemotherapy. However, I was even too weak to start treatment immediately.

After examining my reports, the surgeon was convinced that he could successfully operate on me, despite objections from the other doctors. At first, my family and I were inclined to forego the operation because it was too dangerous, and I myself was afraid of going through another operation. But after our prayers, we decided to hand everything over to God and take the surgeon's advice. We believed that the hands of the doctor were under God's control, as is the life of man.

The operation was scheduled to take place two weeks later on March 16, 1998. But I thought that I would not last that long because my condition was worsening.

A NEW REALIZATION

On one particular snowy night, the view outside my hospital window was very beautiful. At that time I could still walk, so I walked with my wife to the parking lot. She needed a break after having stayed with me in the hospital for such a long time.

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Before she left, I held her very tightly, thinking that we may no longer have the chance to be with each other. It was one of the most wonderful moments we ever had. How could I not have noticed or treasured such moments before?

We often overlook the happiness that is all around us, finding it only when we are about to lose it. Jesus said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!" (Mt 3:2). "Near" does not mean "to come," but rather that it is already here and right beside you. Jesus once said, "The kingdom of God is within you" (Lk 17:21).

Yet some still neglect this; they choose not to accept and follow the words of God, and hence lose the blessings of God's kingdom.

GOD'S GRACE DURING TRIALS

The period of time just prior to my surgery was the most critical and trying because I was dying. At times, I would even lose consciousness. But during that time, many people had wonderful experiences in their prayers. There were numerous times when my wife was deeply moved by the Holy Spirit in prayer and was filled with great joy. She could not understand why she felt so joyful while I was in great pain and at the brink of death. This is the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters from afar

were also touched by the Holy Spirit during their prayers. In fact, they told my wife with all sincerity that I would recover. This is the mystery of the Holy Spirit.

On the evening I considered to be the gravest, I actually finished writing my will. I had vomited a lot of blood, and I thought that God was going to take my life back. My wife decided to spend the night with me in the hospital. By 5 A.M. she still could not fall asleep, when suddenly, she heard the sound of prayer from my bed. It was tongue-speaking—loud, clear, and with strength.

After hearing this sound of prayer, she felt comforted and fell asleep immediately. She thought that a person who could pray in such a way must be fine. I really don't remember praying that night. Again, I believe it was the comfort given by the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered" (Rom 8:26).

I myself also experienced the great power of the Holy Spirit through prayer. I was trying very hard to forget the great physical and mental pain I was feeling and to concentrate during prayer. I tried to make it through by praying to God and relying on Him completely—but I couldn't. I was in great distress. Everything was an obstacle to my concentration and many terrible thoughts came into my mind. That period was extremely difficult to go through.

But amazingly, once I set my heart to submit to the Lord, I gradually calmed down. The Holy Spirit interceded for me and the peace of God came into my heart. I no longer needed to consider how to pray or what to say to God; I simply said, "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!" with nothing else in my mind.

THE "PATH THROUGH THE FOREST"

Thank God, I was able to sustain myself up to the day of the operation. I became very bad-tempered and sad during the few days prior to my operation, but the very day before my operation there was a great change in me. I became kind and gentle, and according to my wife, my face looked like that of "an angel." As I was wheeled into the operating room, she saw me peacefully wave to her, saying, "Peace be with you," as if we were bidding our usual good-byes. I did not feel anything special at that time, just that it was something I needed to do. Nor did I wonder whether or not I would come out of the operation.

Around 10 A.M. the doctor, sweating profusely, emerged from the operating room. Anxiously, he informed my wife that I was in a very critical state, completely beyond his expectations. The tumor was quite large, and it had swelled to a point that it was impinging on my liver. If he tried to remove the tumor, he might hurt the liver and quite possibly kill me. But if he did not remove the tumor and instead just sewed up the incision, I would have at most only two or three days to live.

The doctor had no confidence in proceeding with the operation, so he came out to consult with my wife whether or not he should continue. Thanks to God's grace, He gave my wife the confidence to say, "Do what you can, and we will pray and rely on our God for everything else." The doctor then went back into the operating room.

During the operation, my family continued praying and singing hymns to pass this most critical time. A minister and a brother from the Toronto church showed up unexpectedly, and they offered much

WHEN THE DOCTOR
CAME OUT AGAIN AND
SAID TO MY WIFE,
"YOUR GOD HAS
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comfort. The operation continued until around 4 P.M., when the doctor came out again and said to my wife, "Your God has saved him!" He described the operation as "searching for a path through the forest." He did not know how he managed to complete the operation, but his face showed that it was successful.

THE LORD'S CONTINUED GUIDANCE

The surgeon had removed all of my stomach and spleen, and parts of my pancreas and intestines as well. My entire digestive system was reconstructed. In spite of all that, thank God, my recuperation was very smooth and quick. Gradually, I could eat and absorb nutrients very nicely. After the surgery, I went through six sessions of chemotherapy within six months. Those also went smoothly.

When I left the hospital in April, I weighed 99 pounds (45 kg). The dietitian at the hospital told me that

while I would gain some weight, it was unlikely that I would reach the weight of 132 pounds (60 kg), since I no longer had a stomach. But thank God, just three months later, my weight reached 136 pounds (62 kg) and has remained stable ever since. Now, I go back to the hospital for regular checkups but am no longer on medication. Everything is back to normal.

When I went back to Taiwan in February 1999, I visited my brother-in-law and a sister from our church, who is an anesthesiologist. They told me that there is a concept in surgical circles called "open and close." If a doctor realizes that the situation is out of his control or that there is only a slim chance for success, he does not have to continue the operation. He can simply close up the incision, without consulting the patient's family or taking the risk of continuing with the operation. My doctor could have done it that way, and I believe my family would not have blamed him. But he didn't. I believe it was God's guidance. Through the hands of the surgeon, God showed His power.

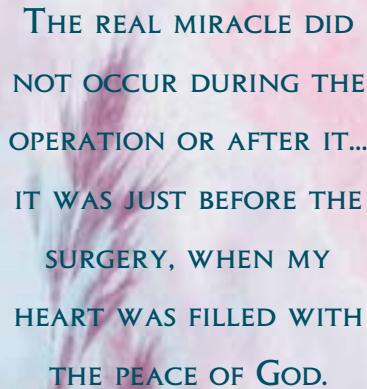
PEACE SURPASSING ALL UNDERSTANDING

I often think about how common such a miracle is in our church. To God, it probably was nothing extraordinary. Jesus can raise the dead; so what is healing physical illness? But to man, this is a great blessing that goes beyond human ability and understanding.

The greatest blessing that God gives us, however, is not the healing of our physical bodies or the blessings of this world. No matter how healthy we are, one day we will die. This is the limitation of the flesh. However, the greatest blessing that God gives us is peace in our heart



Bro. Fritz and his wife Claudia



THE REAL MIRACLE DID
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THE PEACE OF GOD.

and the hope of eternal life. These are the things that are real. If we seize the opportunity in our short and uncertain lives to seek true peace and eternal life, then our lives will be valuable and meaningful.

How does God make us realize this value and meaning? Through spiritual peace. When Jesus was born, a great company of heavenly hosts appeared, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, good will toward men" (Lk 2:14).

Christ's descent to earth is most glorious to God; and the most precious gift He brings to man is peace. True peace can only come through Jesus Christ. That is why Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (Jn 14:27). The true peace from God is not of the world, it surpasses the

world. "The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:7).

A person is saved because of his faith, not by the miracle itself. For that reason, after Jesus heals a person, He always says, "Your faith has saved you." Now I am healed. God has shown me a great miracle. But the real miracle did not occur during the operation or after it. For me, it was just before the surgery, when my

heart was filled with the peace of God and I was no longer worried about what would happen to me—that was my miracle.

When Paul and Silas were in prison (Acts 16:16-40), the actual miracle happened not at the moment that the prison doors opened and their chains came loose. Instead, it was the moment when they were praying and singing hymns to God, and later when they could have escaped but did not, so that the whole family of the jailer could be saved.

In moments like these, the peace and freedom from God accorded them the spiritual power to overcome all physical boundaries so that they were longer chained to anything anymore.

"Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Heb 11:1). May all glory be unto the Lord Jesus. Amen. ★

BE A MISSIONARY VOLUNTEER

Due to the rapid spread of the gospel in many countries (i.e. Africa, India, Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia), the True Jesus Church needs volunteers to help in work such as religious education, pastoring, translation, and church visitation.

If you are willing to serve the Lord, have been a member of the True Jesus Church for more than three years, have the Holy Spirit, and are over twenty years old, please contact the International Assembly of the True Jesus Church for an application form.

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EDITORS NEEDED

For Hebrew, Greek, Italian, and Arabic publications

The IA Department of Literary Ministry (DLM) is looking for volunteers to edit and proofread publications in Hebrew, Greek, Italian, and Arabic. If you are proficient in these languages and are interested in this project, please contact:

Sister Allison Chen
IA DLM Toronto office
Tel/Fax: +1-416-750-1204

Email: iadlmtor@pathcom.com

The Broken Glass



"Our life is like a glass. A glass looks hardy and beautiful when you place it on a table, but if it falls off the table, it breaks. This is how fragile our life is. But only now do I understand who controls this glass."

Derek Lim—SINGAPORE

I can still remember vividly these words of my late father. Though he believed in the Lord for only two and a half years before he passed away, the Lord had given him this understanding that God controls his life. Very often we comfort others in trouble, telling them not to worry, as God is in control of everything. But how many of us are willing to believe our very own words when we are in trouble?

STEPPING ONTO THE THRESHOLD OF FAITH

In November 1995, when I returned home from university, my mother tearfully broke the news that my father had contracted stomach cancer. I was shocked and at a loss for what to do. He was not a believer at that time. My mother was already attending church occasionally, so we

both thought that we should ask my father to come to church and seek God's help. I decided to pray and requested some church brothers to pray about this matter also.

The next day, my entire family came to church together. I thought to myself that it would be so wonderful if God were to save my entire household. We could then come to church together as a family in Christ. This was the first time that my father had stepped into a church. He has been a very strong atheist all his life. Even this first visit was only agreed to grudgingly, after much persuasion.

But most wonderfully, God worked during my father's very first church experience. The Holy Spirit moved him when the sermon was given, and he started to tremble. During the concluding hymn and prayer, tears flowed from his eyes. It

was like a prodigal son returning to his father.

After the service, my father remarked that he should have come to know about God earlier and hoped that his returning now was not too late. The minister then comforted him that what he had just experienced demonstrated the wonderful love of God and that it was never too late to turn to the Lord for salvation.

PEACEFUL REPRIEVE

Thank God that after my father attended his first church service, he experienced the peace of God in the midst of uncertainty and trouble from his illness. Such peace was what Jesus described as not given by the world but by Him (Jn 14:27).

My father did not lose sleep and was able to trust that God takes care

of everything. He underwent a successful surgery, experiencing God's presence with him. After the operation he commented, "if I had not believed in God, the sounds made by the surgical tools would have scared me to death." His recovery from his surgery was miraculously fast.

In December 1995, my family was baptized during the spiritual meeting. I can only thank God for such amazing grace and praise Him for His work in bringing salvation to my household within a short, two-month period. I understood that His wonderful will was behind each thing that He allowed us to encounter in life. My father's illness opened a way to salvation for my family.

Thank God that my father grew in his faith after baptism. He attended all the evening and Sabbath services and prayed daily. Our family also experienced the joy of going to church to worship God together. I felt very happy and blessed.

UNDER THE SHEPHERD'S CARE

In January 1997, the doctor told us that my father's cancer had recurred. This time it had spread to his liver, and he was expected to live for only six months. We were saddened by this news. The six months that followed became a trying but meaningful period for our family's faith.

I remember one occasion when I prayed earnestly to God. During the prayer, God strengthened me and reassured me that He would take care of my family, and that He would be like a shepherd who would lead us through all that might happen. I was greatly comforted and placed my complete trust in God.

Our family started to pray together nightly to ask for God's guidance and for God to bestow the Holy Spirit

on my father. We experienced fellowship in prayers, and this brought my family closer. Church ministers and brethren visited my father very often during his illness and encouraged him to trust in God and to pray for the Holy Spirit. After a long period of persistent prayer, my father received the Holy Spirit.

Though it pained us to see him deteriorating physically each day, it helped us to have the faith to trust in God and to believe in the unseen (2 Cor 4:18). My mother experienced God helping her while she took care of my father during the last stage of his life. Her own health had never been good, and she had undergone four operations previously. But God granted her the physical strength to serve my father's needs. She testified herself that when she looked back at those days, she could not imagine how she had done it. We can only give all the glory to God.

My father was called to rest in the Lord in June 1997. He passed away peacefully at home. God comforted us tremendously. My father did not experience pain throughout the most difficult period of his illness, and the doctors were astonished that he did not complain about any pain. Even now, we still have a few boxes of painkillers at home. Not a single pill was taken.

GOD'S PURPOSE IN ALL THINGS

Although we were sad over the demise of my father, we saw the wonderful hand of God guiding us through those times. The peaceful departure of my father also comforted us greatly, and our faith and conviction toward the Lord was greatly strengthened. I understood that true spiritual joy was not derived just from good things that happened to us; if we submit to God and trust in

His guidance, we can find comfort and joy in Him in all things.

Many question the love and mercy of God when they experience trials and tribulations. Their problems seem insurmountable, and they fail to see the will of God as they go through them. But looking back, the will of God is clear to me now. God allowed these things to happen so that my entire household could receive salvation. God wanted us to exercise our faith by putting complete trust in Him. Through our trial, He gave us the opportunity to draw closer to Him.

While going through this difficult period, I had wondered whether it was the will of God to heal my father. That was what I desired God to accomplish, and I prayed earnestly for it. But I later learned not to impose my own will, but to submit to the will of God and completely entrust all things to Him.

For my father, his life was like a glass that fell from the table and shattered. But I believe that the Lord who saves his soul will keep him safe till we meet in the kingdom of God. As for those of us who are still alive, we should take the advice from King Solomon to remember our Creator while alive, to keep His commandments, to fear Him, and to understand that He must have created us for His wonderful purpose.

*Remember your Creator before the
silver cord is loosed,
Or the golden bowl is broken,
Or the pitcher shattered at the
fountain,
Or the wheel broken at the well.
(Eccl 12:6)*

*To Him be the glory and the
dominion forever and ever. Amen.
(1 Pet 5:11) ★*

“Peace be with you” is a phrase often used by believers to bid farewell. I, too, often use this phrase, and I believe that it is not just an empty cliché. The phrase expresses my blessing and intercession for a person, and the feeling of being one in the Lord gives me spiritual joy. Many times I am tempted to say “peace” as I bid farewell to my nonbelieving friends, but I swallow it back, thinking that they might not understand its implication. I hope that one day they, too, can draw near to the Lord and experience the true meaning of peace.



LET THE PEACE RULE IN

WHAT IS THE PEACE OF CHRIST?

To most people, peace means having good health, financial stability, and success in their career. However, life has twists and turns—you may encounter an accident; suffer physical or mental distress; or lose your job, a loved one, your property, or health—and therefore you may lose the “peace” in your heart and your sense of security.

The Lord Jesus once told His disciples, “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). Genuine peace comes directly from the Lord; it is not found in the world and cannot be attained by human effort. Many people spend their lives building their castle of wealth, status, power, and health. Unfortunately, they are unaware that this castle is so fragile that it cannot withstand a single blow.

God tells us that He will give us peace, but also that as long as we’re in this world we will experience tribulation. Most people think that there is a conflict between peace and tribulation, that one cannot have peace when one suf-

fers bankruptcy, illness, or the loss of a job. But in the sight of God, tribulation and peace can co-exist without contradicting each other. God had promised us His peace, but He did not guarantee a smooth course of life.

How then, do we experience true peace from God? We need to receive from Him the spiritual insight to transcend our physical circumstances and to see the great blessing of eternal life to come. Both the splendors and the tragedies of life on this earth are but clouds that quickly pass, not worth putting to heart.

While Paul and Silas were locked up in jail, they sang hymns praising God (Acts 16:25). The peace of Christ sustained them, because they understood that suffering with Christ was a joy and a blessing (1 Pet 4:12-14). Trials and persecution can only harm the body, not the soul. With almighty and compassionate God by our side, what can happen to us? Compared to our heavenly inheritance, our present tribulations are light and momentary (2 Cor 4:17).

HOW TO ATTAIN THE PEACE OF CHRIST

God has promised us that all our needs will be provided

for if we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Mt 6:33). “Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things” (Mt 6:32-33). By understanding the divine love of God, we can put aside our worries and experience the peace of Christ.

The Lord Jesus tells us that whoever believes and is baptized will be saved (Mk 16:16). If we believe in the True God and receive the baptisms of water and the Holy Spirit, we can enjoy the peace of Christ and our future eternal inheritance in heaven. The Lord gave Himself up on the cross for our salvation, and by His precious blood,

ter of our hearts. He must be the master, not the servant or guest. By using His word as our guide in decision-making and our standard in daily demeanor, we can allow the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts.

We can learn from the Israelites’ attitude of complete reliance on the Lord as they wandered in the wilderness. No one went his own way or walked ahead of the pillars of fire and cloud. We may find it difficult to rely on God completely if we do not fully believe that He has His good will in all things. However, this attitude will not glorify God, and it will also prevent us from obtaining true peace.

By studying the Bible, we can grow in the knowledge of God’s mightiness, righteousness, and love—blessings

OF CHRIST YOUR HEART

(Adapted from an article by Li-Ling Huang, *Holy Spirit Monthly* #100, Jan 1986)

He cleanses us of our sin. He redeems us from the domain of this world and fills us with His grace. God does not do this because of our righteousness or effort, but because of His love. We must be thankful because even though we are not worthy of His grace, we have been called to the peace of Christ (Col 3:15).

Through faith we can receive unlimited peace and blessings from God. Some people desire power, some desire wealth; yet power and wealth are limited and short-lived. How can they measure up to God’s providence, which lasts from this life until eternity? King David knew best in applying this faith: “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want... You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over” (Ps 23:1, 5).

HOW TO LET THE PEACE OF CHRIST RULE IN OUR HEARTS

Some people have plaques in their homes or churches saying, “Christ is the master of this house.” Christ is the head of the church, but we must also allow Him to be the mas-

ter that we can experience and obtain. David said, “O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup” (Ps 16:5). God is my inheritance, your inheritance, and the inheritance of all believers. By understanding David’s joy, we can then understand that “all things work together for good to those who love God” (Rom 8:28). Whether we encounter tribulation, sickness, misfortune, or prosperity, our prayer should be, “May the Lord’s will be done.” Such a prayer allows the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts.

Anxieties come from the loss of support. If Christ is our everlasting reliance, we can be assured that His peace and joy will abide with us forever. If we let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, we can be one with the Lord, in whom we live out the image of a new man and whose example we follow in all things (Eph 4:17-24). Eventually, we can proclaim with a clear conscience as Paul did, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). If we can learn to adopt the mind of Christ, we will receive the peace of Christ in abundance, along with the future blessing of eternal life. ★

A

*"Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father's house...." (Gen 12:1)
These were the first words that God spoke to Abraham, the
father of His chosen people.*

SEPARATE PEOPLE

KC Tsai—Toronto, Ontario, CANADA



In the Old Testament, God made a covenant with His people, choosing them from among the nations to be a people for Himself. He blessed and guided them, loving them exclusively (Deut 7:6-7). He expected them to set themselves apart from the other nations, forbidding them to marry or have relations with outsiders. They belonged to God and were to serve Him wholeheartedly.

In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus established a covenant with His disciples through His blood, such that whoever comes to God through Jesus Christ will be saved (Heb 7:25). He intercedes for those who are His; and yet He does not pray for the world (Jn 17:9), for His people are not of the world (Jn 17:14-16). The Lord desires that His people be filled with joy and live holy lives. Though they live in this world, they are purified and considered holy through the truth.

SEPARATION THEN

While Abraham was in Haran, God commanded him to leave his country and his people, and He would bless him. Abraham obeyed the word of God and left Haran (Acts 7:4). From that point on, God's guidance and blessings never left him. God considered Abraham His friend (Is 41:8), establishing the covenant of circumcision with him and blessing his descendants abundantly. God separated them from all peoples on the earth to be His children.

While His people were suffering in Egypt, God commanded Moses to bring Israel—His firstborn son—out of Egypt so that they might serve Him (Ex 4:22-23). To “serve” and to “leave” have a direct relation with each

other; only after the Israelites left Egypt would they be able to serve God.

After His people left Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and journeyed to the wilderness of Sinai, God called to Moses from the mountain, saying,

...if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Ex 19:5)

He also established the Ten Commandments: laws by which His people were to abide, separating themselves as God's people from the nations of the earth.

Forty years after their deliverance from Egypt, the Israelites arrived at the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River. The Moabites were petrified and asked Balaam to curse the Israelites. Instead, God conveyed this message to the king of Moab through Balaam:

AS CHILDREN OF GOD,
IT IS IMPORTANT
FOR US TO SET
OURSELVES APART.

*How shall I curse whom God has not cursed?
And how shall I denounce whom the LORD has
not denounced?
For from the top of the rocks I see him,
And from the hills I behold him;
There! A people dwelling alone,
Not reckoning itself among the nations.
(Num 23:8-9)*

From the history of the chosen people, it is clear that God desired His people to be a blessed and holy nation. The messages of prophets, the departing words of the Lord, and the epistles of the disciples all express the same desire of the Lord: Leave! Separate yourselves from them!

Yet we see that throughout history, the chosen ones did not separate themselves from the world. When the Israelites asked Samuel for a king, they simply wanted to be "like all the nations" (1 Sam 8:5). They imitated the world in its ways, wanting to be "ruled by man" instead of by God, who was supposed to be their king (1 Sam 12:12). What about us?

SEPARATION NOW

Broken marriages, infidelity, sexual promiscuity, repulsive attire, godless conversations, money-driven lives, substance abuse—these have become society's norms. So many people are doing it. What about me?

Television and other media have replaced God's

words as the guide to people's attitudes toward life and morality. Worldly ideals silently exert a subtle, but powerful, influence on the children of God, gradually leading them into a world where separation no longer exists.

As children of God, it is important for us to set ourselves apart (2 Cor 6:17-18). But our ability to do this is often tested by colleagues, associates, politicians, and celebrities whose fashionable but ultimately vain lives present a false reality. Some of us have become skeptical and ask, "Why be different from the rest?"

The Lord Jesus said that His disciples were not of the world, just as He was not of the world. He sanctified himself for the sake of His disciples (Jn 17:16-19). How, then, can we claim to be the Lord's disciples if we do not persevere for Him? Friendship with the world is enmity with

God (Jas 4:4). The elect of God simply cannot compromise their values to fit worldly trends. If a person loves the world and covets the things of the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 Jn 2:15).

Society is increasingly tolerant of sin; so much so that in upholding the absolute truth and keeping the word of the Lord, one is often perceived as narrow-minded and arrogant.

They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. (1 Pet 4:4-5)

Some believers today may wonder why the church does not unite with other Christian denominations. The unwillingness to compromise the truth is interpreted as arrogance. However, the more pertinent question is, how can the truth tolerate falsehood? How can differing faiths unite without the truth being compromised? Amid society's wave of "tolerance," will the church remain firm in its stance without conceding to or complying with worldly trends?

The world continues to change. Regardless of the outcome, it is increasingly important for us to preserve the Lord's way. Our life of faith must resist the drift away from the truth.

This, then, is the will of God: to separate ourselves from the world, to be a people dwelling alone, to embrace a truth-based value system, to set our minds on the spiritual things above, and to conduct ourselves in holiness and purity. We are to become a holy nation, a royal priesthood, and a people belonging to God (1 Pet 2:9). ★

TRUE JESUS CHURCH Internet Report



Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Mt 28:19–20)

The Lord Jesus' command identifies the threefold mission of the church: to preach the gospel to all nations, to baptize believers in Jesus' name, and to pastor them to live according to His teachings. To fulfill this commission, the church has relied on personal evangelism; local church initiatives, such as hospital outreach, open houses, and visitations; church services; and missionary trips. To support these efforts, we produce publications, such as booklets, flyers, and magazines, as well as audiocassettes and videotapes. Seldom have we used mass media to disseminate the truth or cultivate the faith of members; thus the spread of the gospel has been dependent largely on physical contact.

Manna issue #31 examined the challenges that the church faces in preaching the gospel to people of all nations and developing into a truly multiethnic body. The day is coming, we know, when the gospel will break through national and racial boundaries and Jesus' commission ultimately will be fulfilled. That day may be sooner than we think; indeed, the threshold is here.

The day has come when a student in a Missouri public school; a seminary student in central Tennessee; a devout Christian in Scandinavia; a church pastor in Milan, Italy; a Muslim man in an Islamic country; and other ethnically diverse seekers of the truth can log on from around the world, learn about the gospel, and contact our church. Through the Internet, the work of spreading the Word now transcends limitations of place and time, culture, and skin color—reaching people in places where we, as a church, have not physically traveled. It is as if a wind has blown through, shaking the seeds off the stems, carrying them to distant, even barren, places. When they land, some of these seeds will begin to germinate in the new soil. But who will be there to water the seeds and nurture them as they grow?

THE WEB'S POTENTIAL

In 1998, the International Assembly (IA) of the True Jesus Church launched its web site, www.truejesuschurch.org (also www.tjc.org). Without registering the web site with

any search engines, we received an average of two thousand distinct visitors to the site per month in 1999. The most active countries (in terms of the number of user sessions) in December 1999 and January 2000 included not only the United States, Malaysia, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, and Australia, but also the United Arab Emirates, Brunei, Germany, Sweden, Italy, and Ghana [see chart on page 23 for recent statistics]. Within the U.S. alone, many visitors reside in areas without a local True Jesus Church, such as Georgia, Minnesota, Virginia, and North Carolina.

If we estimate that half of the visitors to the web site are members, then about one thousand nonmembers are visiting us every month—without any promotion or registration of the site on our part. If half of them come across the site randomly, then about five hundred visitors come to the site with some interest—some searching for keywords such as “Christ,” “baptism,” “feet,” and “washing.” Half that number would mean about two hundred and fifty truthseekers per month read through our site and learn about our basic beliefs. Statistics from December show that users spent an average of fourteen minutes at the site. If only ten percent of those truthseekers are interested enough to contact the church, that would be twenty-five people every month.

Indeed, we receive about five or six online inquiries per week from nonmembers [see sidebar on page 22 for examples of some of the recent inquiries]. If only ten percent of those who contacted the church could be convinced of the truth, then every month, two new souls would be saved—every year, twenty-four people would be converted, or the equivalent of a local church. With site promotion, that potential may increase exponentially.

ARE WE READY?

The power of the Internet as a tool is the ability to present a wealth of content to users worldwide not just in a way that is easy to find, but also in a way that addresses their specific interests and needs. The current True Jesus Church web site is unable to accommodate the addition and management of all the articles, testimonies, audio sermons, Bible studies, devotionals, reference materials, and news and church information that we would like to make available to users.

The IA is presently developing a new database-driven web to better manage and present the information and resources we provide, and to enable the church to keep track of the increasing number of orders, inquiries, and other requests received. The IA has authorized the US General Assembly to manage and implement this project. This new, centralized site will establish a consistent, unified representation of the church and the gospel to the world.

To continue this work, we need database administrators, web programmers, writers and editors in various languages, and graphic designers; marketers and beta testers; people with the spiritual knowledge to answer truthseekers' questions and to moderate discussion forums; project leaders; and project funds [see pp. 24-25 for full-time job openings]. Currently, the church lacks adequate support to meet even present demands. While we can continue to preach through the Internet and provide resources for believers to cultivate their faith, we cannot convert people online, baptizing them in Jesus' name. Are we prepared to respond when the Macedonian of today seeks us from Minnesota, or Manchester, England, or the island of Mauritius?

A PLENTIFUL HARVEST

According to statistics from International Data Corporation (IDC), by 2003, 62% of U.S. residents will be online, as will 44% of residents in Europe, and 11% of the population worldwide. By the year 2005, there will be approximately one billion web users worldwide. Sites like Yahoo.com currently have over 100 million registered users. Internet service providers estimate that web traffic doubles approximately every nine months. An exponentially growing number of people are turning to the web, and spending more of their lives online. Society is changing, and although the word of God remains the same, these transformations of the world around us inevitably impact our ministry. They affect not only how we evangelize to nonbelievers, but also how we pastor to the increasing number of members and to the younger generation growing up online.

Through the Internet, the church and the truth she represents are suddenly visible—exposed to the wide world. We pray that God will guide us in this ministry, that we may know His will, according to His time. But we also pray that when the time comes, we will be equipped to accomplish the task. When the curious, the confused, the lost, the seekers, and the skeptics search online, what will they find? Will we who are sent be there to meet them and lead them to the truth?

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to his disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” (Mt 9:35-38)

Internet Report

Here are some recent inquiries and responses we've received from visitors to our web site

October 18, 1999

"I'm an Italian Bible believer and a short time ago I became acquainted with your ministry. I'm very interested to learn more about your history, doctrinal beliefs, activities and publications. I would like to receive some of your literature (namely booklets and/or tracts) and also your denominational magazine. I'm waiting for your answer and I thank you very much in advance."

~Visitor from Italy

October 20, 1999

"I saw your web site and I am interested in two points. (1) Are we saved when we accept Jesus and believe, or at water baptism? (2) What does the Holy Spirit have to do with our salvation? After I believe in Jesus and have been baptized, if I died without the Holy Spirit, would I be lost (Titus 3:3-5)? I am searching for answers to other questions that I had for a long time..."

~Visitor from Massachusetts, USA

November 9, 1999

"I'm thankful beyond words for the doctrinal truths that are restored in your church! Issues such as the oneness of God (one person, not three), the True Sabbath (Seventh Day, Saturday), the Baptism of the Holy Ghost (with speaking in tongues as initial evidence) and as a requirement for the new birth and entering the Kingdom, the vision of the restored church (the body and bride of Christ) are all precious stones on the wonderful Foundation. In these issues I have the same position as you do. I was very happy to find a church that has all of these truths restored."

~Visitor from Sweden

November 29, 1999

"It's a pleasure and an honor to see another Sabbath keeping church in this turned around world. Reading your website I see we practice the same doctrines of the Bible (Sabbath, footwashing, baptism in Jesus' name). I'd really like to set a time to fellowship together in person."

~Visitor from Virginia, USA

December 4, 1999

"Today, by the direction of the Holy Ghost, we came upon your web site and w[ere] overwhelmed by the amount of information in it...We are excited about learning that there are true Apostolic Saints around the world and laboring in the gospel. We would like to learn more about your church, and become acquainted with the saints of the most High God."

~Visitor from North Carolina, USA

January 1, 2000

"Please send more information on how our church can join the True Jesus Church."

~An elder from an apostolic church in Michigan, USA

February 15, 2000

"I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God and I want to be baptized in His name. I have been to the Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Seventh Day Adventist Church, but I want to belong to a church that does not deny Jesus' name. I have been searching for the true church, and I really want to be baptized in my Lord Jesus Christ's name. I know that there is no other name that can save me."

~Visitor from New York, USA

February 25, 2000

"I am a Muslim and would like to convert to Christianity. Please tell me how. As you know, here in Arabic nations, it is very risky to do this. So please help me."

~Visitor from the Arab nations

My name is Robin McKee. I had been attending the Seventh Day Adventist church before I came to the True Jesus Church. I was baptized in the Adventist church in December 1999, but still didn't feel like I was saved. I felt like something was missing.

About two weeks after I was baptized, I received a message on a five-dollar bill that read Acts 2:38. Then I knew I had to be baptized in Jesus' name. But where could I find a church that kept the Sabbath and baptized in Jesus' name? One day, I typed into an internet search engine "Jesus' True Church" and what popped up was the True Jesus Church. That is how I found the True Jesus Church. I discovered that the founder of the True Jesus Church is Jesus Christ, whereas the founders of other churches are men and women.

On April 23, 2000, my family and I were baptized. After the sacrament of footwashing, my husband received the Holy Spirit.

Three days after the baptism, my daughter Brittany, who is six years old, had a dream. She saw Jesus in her dream, and a light was shining on Him. There were stairs, because we had gone to a higher place. We all sat on Jesus' lap, and then afterwards we were all sitting on mats speaking in tongues.

I cannot find any error in the True Jesus Church. I would encourage all people out there to search out the truth. We owe it to ourselves and to God.

Internet Ministry Needs FUNDING

Despite what the current True Jesus Church website has accomplished so far, it is far from finished. Presenting our beliefs on the web is only the initial part of the work. The goal is also to make available articles, testimonies, audio sermons, Bible studies, devotionals, reference materials, and news and church information. This centralized site will establish a consistent, unified representation of the church and the gospel to the world.

To fund this tremendous but worthwhile project, including the full-time staff needed for the ministry, we need every True Jesus Church member and local church to take part in this project by offering their financial support. The IA established the Internet Ministry Fund in order meet the project's current and growing demands. Our immediate target is \$150,000 per year. This amount will enable us to recruit three full-time personnel, who are immediately needed. As we begin to put the site on search engines, the financial demand will also grow according to the increase in site visitors.

The church needs your support! If the Lord has moved you to take part in this ministry, please consider how much you can contribute. You may give your freewill offering to your local church treasurer and indicate that it is for the "TJC Internet Ministry Fund."

For those in the U.S., please send your contribution to

General Assembly of the True Jesus Church, U.S.A.
Attn: TJC Internet Ministry Fund
11236 Dale Street
Garden Grove, CA 92841 USA

For those outside of U.S., send your contribution to:

International Assembly of the True Jesus Church
Attn: TJC Internet Ministry Fund
11236 Dale Street
Garden Grove, CA 92841 USA

In addition to one-time contributions, we also urgently need the support through pledges. In order to sustain this permanent ministry, we are seeking members to join the "Internet Support Group" by contributing \$20, \$50, \$100 or more a month on a monthly basis. To join the Support Group, please fill out the enclosed "Pledge Card" and give it to your local church treasurer, who will include you in the group and submit your name to the IA or USGA. Then simply give your contribution to the treasurer once every six months.

Web Statistics as of Feb 2000

- ◆ Average of 2,000 distinct visitors per month
- ◆ Geographically diverse (see below)
- ◆ Most requested pages: devotionals; our church; basic beliefs
- ◆ Average of 25-30 inquiries per month
- ◆ 200+ on electronic mailing list

Global Distribution of Users

| | Countries | User Sessions |
|----|-------------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | United States | 3012 |
| 2 | Malaysia | 147 |
| 3 | Canada | 135 |
| 4 | UK | 83 |
| 5 | Singapore | 76 |
| 6 | Taiwan | 60 |
| 7 | Australia | 47 |
| 8 | Greece | 38 |
| 9 | Indonesia | 35 |
| 10 | New Zealand (Aotearoa) | 31 |
| 11 | Japan | 25 |
| 12 | Norway | 12 |
| 13 | Belgium | 9 |
| 14 | Ghana | 9 |
| 15 | Hong Kong | 8 |
| | Total for the countries Above | 3727 |

Visit the
True Jesus Church
website
for

Basic Beliefs
Devotionals
Christian Living
Testimonies
Publications

Question and Answer
Church Information

www.tjc.org

Knowing God's Will

God's will.

It is so broad and all-encompassing that it touches every aspect of life, yet sometimes, it is also quite puzzling. Many of us may wonder, what is God's will for me? Whom should I marry? Which kind of career should I pursue? Where should I live? How does God want me to serve Him? Am I headed in the right direction?

The following articles show that God's will is not as obscure or incomprehensible as it sometimes seems. They help us understand the nature of God's will and how it relates to humankind as well as the individual. The articles also give practical guidance on how to discover God's will when we're facing difficult crossroads. Most importantly, they help us to actively carry out God's will in our lives.

Many of us often pray to the Lord, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." As we come to a better understanding of God's will and truly begin to carry it out in our daily lives, may this prayer will become a reality.



Understanding God's Will

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The Lord Jesus Christ teaches us to pray that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Mt 6:10). He reigns as king in heaven, for His will has been fulfilled. Whenever His will is done on earth, His kingdom is realized in our hearts (Lk 17:21).

The kingdom of God is the main theme of Jesus' ministry. He proclaimed that the kingdom of God is at hand (Mt 4:17) and advised the world to seek His kingdom and to seek righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17). For those who abide in His kingdom, the blessings of this life shall be provided (Mt 6:33) as well as the eventual glory of eternal life in heaven (Mt 13:43).

THE WILL OF GOD: GOOD, ACCEPTABLE, AND PERFECT

The will of God is derived from God's divine nature. God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, and His deity is full of righteousness, holiness, and compassion (Ps 103:8; Eph 4:24). No one is good but God alone (Lk 18:19); thus, His will is good, acceptable, and perfect (Rom 12:2).

God's Good Will. In obedience to his father, Joseph went to look for his brothers who were grazing the flock. When Joseph found them, his brothers sold him to Egypt

as a slave because of their jealousy (Acts 7:9). In Egypt, Joseph resisted sin with his master's wife out of godly fear, but because of his refusal, the woman framed him and he was imprisoned (Gen 39). Joseph's faith was tested as he suffered in the Egyptian prison (Ps 105:17-19), which seemed to contradict God's revelation to him that he would be great among his household (Gen 37:5-11). Eventually, according to God's timing and will, Joseph was promoted to prime minister of Egypt. He then realized that although his brothers meant evil against him, God meant good for him; and not only for Joseph alone but also for many others whose lives would be saved through Joseph's actions (Gen 50:19-20).

God's Acceptable Will. God allowed Job to undergo trial by the hand of Satan, who deprived him of all his possessions, his children, and his health. Even his wife told him to abandon his integrity, to curse God, and die (Job 2:9). The comfort offered by his friends only deepened his indescribable suffering. Although Job cursed the day he was born and debated with his friends about his affliction,

tions, he did not sin by charging God with wrong, and instead praised His name (Job 1:21-22). In the end, he accepted God's will for him and declared that his faith had been elevated from only hearing of God to seeing Him (Job 42:5). Job received even more abundant blessings from God after his trials.

God's Perfect Will. The Lord Jesus Christ came to the world to save sinners. Although Jesus was sinless, the Pharisees and scribes persecuted Him out of jealousy and covetousness, working together with Judas Iscariot, His betrayer, to crucify Him on the cross. In the last of the seven utterances of Jesus on the cross, He said, "It is finished." God's perfect plan of salvation was accomplished through the hands of the lawless. Indeed, God works in everything for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28).

GOD'S UNIVERSAL WILL AND GOD'S INDIVIDUAL WILL

God's will consists of His universal will as well as His individual will for each of us. His universal will is the same for everyone: that no one should perish, but that everyone will come to repentance (2 Pet 3:9); that we should rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks (1 Thess 5:16-18); that we should be sanctified, avoid sexual immorality, and keep our bodies holy and honorable (1 Thess 4:3-5); that all our deeds be edifying to ourselves, beneficial to others, and glorifying to the name of God (1 Cor 10:23-31).

At the same time, God's will for each individual is unique. He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and His plan for each of them was different. His will for Abraham was for him to leave his hometown, Ur. However, God's will for Isaac was for him to stay in Canaan even during a famine. His plan was for Abraham to have one son but for Jacob to have twelve sons, whose descendants would become the twelve tribes of Israel. God has tailored a perfect plan for each of us regarding our education, career, marriage, place of residence, health, and all other aspects of life. We need to stand firm in His will, fully assured that He has planned for us a fruitful and meaningful life (Col 4:12).

God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor are God's ways our ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth,

The key to understanding His will lies in pursuing spiritual renewal in Jesus Christ... The more we become like Jesus, the deeper we can comprehend the heart of God, for the mystery of God is Christ Jesus.

so God's ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Is 55:8-9). Those who are spiritual search all things, even the deep things of God and His profound will, for they have the mind of the Lord to instruct them (1 Cor 2:10-16). When Jesus was twelve years old, He had wisdom and stature. He understood God's will and cared for his Father's business, even though His mother could not understand His ways (Lk 2:40-52). In order to understand God's will, we need to grow in maturity in the Lord Jesus Christ.

HOW TO KNOW GOD'S WILL

In order to prove God's will, we must be transformed by the renewing of our mind (Rom 12:2). The nature of the world is lust and pride, which is contrary to the nature of God (1 Jn 2:16; Gal 5:17). Those who conform to the world cannot understand the will of God. As they wandered in the wilderness, the Israelites could not perceive God's will because they were overcome by fleshly desires (Ps 106:12-26). Most of them displeased God and perished in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:5).

The key to understanding His will lies in pursuing spiritual renewal in Jesus Christ (Rom 12:2). Spiritual renewal can be achieved through the process of pursuing the likeness of Jesus Christ through His words, His Spirit, and His love. The more we become like Jesus, the deeper we can comprehend the heart of God, for the mystery of God is Christ Jesus (Col 2:2).

Knowing God's Word. We can understand God's will by increasing our knowledge of His word (Rom 2:18), the will of God is in accordance with His word. Whenever we abide in His word, we do according to His will, in such things as marrying in the same faith (1 Cor 7:39), bringing up children in the Lord (Eph 6:4), and building a God-centered family (Josh 24:15). His word is spirit and life. We can understand His will by studying His word spiritually in depth. By searching the word of God daily and living accordingly, we can abide in God's will.

The Pharisees were well versed in the literal interpretations of the Law of Moses, but they failed to understand that Jesus was the Savior prophesied in the Old Testament. Before his conversion, the apostle Paul served God with zeal but without true knowledge (Rom 10:2).

If we can elevate our earthly love to be like the divine love of Jesus, our understanding of God's will will be more apparent in our daily lives.

After Paul was converted, however, God revealed to Paul His will regarding justification by faith (Hab 2:4).

Being Filled with the Spirit. We can understand God's will by being filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God will bestow on us His wisdom (Eph 1:17) so that we can fully understand His will.

The Holy Spirit clearly guided the apostles to make important breakthroughs in God's ministry. He directed Philip to approach the Ethiopian eunuch and preach to him (Acts 8:26-39). He worked miraculously to convert the gentile Cornelius to Christ (Acts 10). He repeatedly moved Paul to amend his plans and eventually bring the gospel to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10). Today, the same Spirit of God will move us to walk according to His will even when there are no clear answers from the Bible (Phil 2:13).

Loving Others with Divine Love. We can understand God's will by loving others with the divine love of the Lord Jesus, which comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith (1 Tim 1:5). Only when we love with the love of Jesus Christ can our love please God and edify others. The Bible encourages us to love with knowledge and discernment (Phil 1:9).

After Jesus revealed that He would be crucified, Peter rebuked Him and said, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to you!" (Mt 16:21-22). Peter was minding the things of men, not the things of God; thus Jesus considered his love and concern to be the work of Satan (Mt 16:23). After the resurrection of Christ Jesus, Peter loved Jesus and eventually died for Him according to God's will (Jn 21:15-19).

Unlike the Pharisees, the Lord Jesus approached sinners with compassion (Lk 15:2, 19:7). If we can elevate our earthly love to be like the divine love of Jesus, our understanding of God's will in our daily lives will be more apparent.

WALKING IN GOD'S WILL

Jesus Christ has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to His kingdom (Col 1:13). He is our Lord and has authority over us, and we need to abide in His will to please Him fully.

God chose Saul to be the first king of the Israelites. However, Saul did not understand that obedience to God

was more important than sacrifice, and so he ignored God's command to eliminate all the Amalekites and their property.

His disobedience grieved the Lord, and so He chose David, a man after His own heart, to replace Saul (1 Sam 15).

In contrast, the Lord Jesus did not speak on His own authority but according to the Father's commands (Jn 12:49); He did nothing of His own accord but only in like manner of His Father (Jn 5:19). He did not seek His own will, but the will of the Father who sent Him (Jn 5:30). Thus, God declared that Jesus Christ was His only beloved Son, with whom He was well pleased (Mt 17:5). Jesus Christ is like a grain of wheat that produces much grain after it falls into the earth and dies. He commanded us to deny ourselves and follow His footsteps to be fruitful in every good work (Jn 12:26).

The nobility and value of man rested in the image of God, which was given in the beginning of God's creation. Once Adam defied God's will, he sinned and God's image in him diminished. The ultimate goal in fulfilling God's will is to manifest the image of God for the glory of His name and to lead a life worthy of the Lord (Col 1:10). We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph 2:10).

The wisdom of Solomon surpassed all generations, yet he led life according to his own pleasures. He had enjoyed everything under the sun, but he concluded that life was nothing but vanity. Paul, in contrast, followed the pattern of Jesus' life to fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith. He concluded his life with the hope that a crown of righteousness was ready for him (2 Tim 4:7-8). Therefore, a successful and meaningful life results from understanding and abiding in God's will.

Our understanding of God now is like seeing in a mirror dimly. We must continuously renew ourselves to be like Christ Jesus while pursuing God's will. Jesus declared that the Father is in Him, He is in the Father, and He and the Father are one (Jn 10:30). As we grow spiritually and become more like Jesus, we will become more intimate with God, and our knowledge of Him can increase beyond measure. May all of us be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that we can lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God (Col 1:9-10).

"I delight to do thy will, O my God." (Ps 40:8) ★

Making Choices

All children yearn for the day when they are free to make independent decisions rather than be confined within the boundaries chosen and dictated by their parents. We all have at least faint memories of those frustrating years when we could not choose to watch television or play because it was time for bed or studying, when we could not choose to stay in bed because it was time for school, or when we did not even have a choice of food because our favorite dish was unhealthy.

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Ironically, after we finally grow up, we often find ourselves under tremendous pressure when flooded with the many choices we have to make, particularly when those choices are no longer over trivial matters. And this pressure can be further increased by the potential consequences of those choices. Although we know theoretically that we need to seek God's will at these crossroads in our lives, we often struggle in putting this knowledge into practice. How do we know what the will of God is for us? What must we do to arrive at this understanding and comfort?

LEAD A GODLY LIFE OF CONSTANT, DEEP COMMUNION WITH GOD

Some Christians may harbor the misconception that God's will is manifested in supernatural ways such as visions, dreams, voices from heaven, or various signs. Hence, in their misguided search to understand God's will, they may seek these experiences. And when their expectations are not met, they may end up confused and disappointed, concluding that God has not answered their pleas and has not directed them in His path.

Undeniably, God revealed His will clearly to some people in the Bible through supernatural encounters. For example, there was direct contact between God and Noah when God instructed him to build the ark (Gen 6:13–7:6). Likewise, God spoke directly to Abraham, telling him to migrate from his homeland to the land of Canaan (Gen 12:1–5); and He appeared in the burning bush, revealing His will for Moses to deliver the Israelites (Ex 3:1–4:20). We could also add the example of Paul's encounter on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–22). These divine encounters dramatically transformed the lives of these men and shaped their way forward.

Although when we see them gathered in a list we may get the impression that such encounters were common, we must realize that they actually took place among different people over a long period of time. Each of these individuals may have had only one, or at most a few, such encounters in their entire lives. Hence, like us, at most of the crossroads in their lives they had to make choices without such direct encounters with God.

Still, even without constant supernatural guidance, these men generally made the right choices and led their lives in a way that was pleasing to God. A closer examination of their stories reveals that it was not the supernatural experiences, but rather their constant relationship and deep communion with God that saw them through. The supernatural experiences were often only a kick-start into action—it was their unceasing worship of God, their faithful adherence to His instructions and laws, and their humble submission to His power and authority that built the

ever-deepening relationship that channeled them in the right direction.

Jesus Himself left a good example for us during His ministry on earth. From the tender age of twelve, He had esteemed the word of God and His Father's business (Lk 2:46–49). Before He formally began His ministry, He spent forty days and nights fasting and praying in the wilderness (Mt 4:1–2). There is no record that the names of the apostles were specifically revealed to Jesus, but it was after a night of prayer that He called them (Lk 6:12–16). Such close communion with God can be witnessed throughout Jesus' life even to the final moments in Gethsemane, when the will of God prevailed in the struggle against the will of man (Mt 26:36–46).

The lesson for us, therefore, is that when we need to make a major decision, we should not seek an obvious supernatural experience as an indication of God's will, or else we are likely to find ourselves unnecessarily disappointed. Rather, we should constantly strive to lead a godly life of deep communion with God. In this way, we will know the right direction to take when we encounter crossroads in our lives, and we can then confidently move forward, witnessing the will of God as it unfolds before our eyes.

RECONCILE OUR CHOICE WITH THE GENERAL WILL OF GOD

As we build up a deep communion with God, we must also determine if our choices are against His general will. We live in a very different era from that of the men we read about in the Bible. Unlike us, they never had the complete Bible, with the principles and laws of God clearly spelled out. Neither did they have the Holy Spirit poured into their hearts to guide them unto all truths, to counsel and motivate them. In some cases, such as Noah and Abraham, they never had an institution like the church, or even peers who could encourage them. It is no wonder then that God revealed Himself to these selected people in special ways.

For us today, however, the general will of God has already been recorded in the Bible. Often, through passages in the Bible that we read, through a quiet realization in our prayers as we reflect on the word of God, through sermons testifying His word, or even through the encouragement of friends in church, we realize that God has already indicated the direction we should take.

Hence, if we truly want to understand God's will for us, we must not numb our senses to these channels. We may rightfully protest that the Bible does not include an exhaustive list of scenarios, but it does contain universal principles that can apply to every situation. The Bible may not specify whether we should become an accountant, a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer, or a teacher, but it does

contain clear moral specifications of right and wrong to help us determine if our choice of career entangles us in sins against God. Likewise, the Bible may not name the exact person we should choose as a spouse, but it does contain clear principles such as the instruction to marry in the Lord. If we examine the Bible closely, it will also reveal those qualities that God deems as virtues, which we should use in our selection of a spouse.

A summation of all these principles in the Bible, as they apply to every angle of our lives, points us to the paramount issue—salvation. That is, the general will of God for each of us is to use our limited time on earth to work toward our salvation. It is critical at every crossroad in our lives to consider honestly whether our choice brings us nearer to or further from God, whether the direction we are adopting is toward salvation or destruction.

Some choices may seem neutral at first, yet we should always consider their potential consequences. For example, while many jobs do not directly contradict biblical principles, they may open the floodgates to the potential need to lie, entertain at night-spots, or engage in vicious office politics, or they may bind us with such a heavy workload and pressure that our time and minds are taken from God. In such cases, we need to re-evaluate our choices. This idea also applies to the selection of academic courses, since they ultimately channel us toward certain career choices.

CONSIDER THE MOTIVES BEHIND OUR CHOICES

God wants us to worship Him in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24), to maintain a good conscience and sincere faith (1 Tim 1:5), and to be a true Israelite in whom there is no deceit (Jn 1:47). Thus while some choices may seem harmless, as they do not seem to violate the general will of God or lead us to undesirable consequences, we still must be cautious not to err in our motives.

For example, have we made a career choice based on our subconscious attraction to the monetary rewards and status it brings, comforting ourselves that the job does not contradict biblical principles, and yet blinding ourselves to the potential dangers lurking ahead? Or have we chosen a spouse because of a subconscious attraction to his or her physical beauty and social status, comforting ourselves that he or she is after all a church believer, and yet ignoring the Christian virtues that should have been our paramount consideration? Sometimes, even though our choices in themselves seem acceptable on the surface, our true motives have left a foothold for the devil.

Lot's choice to take his family to Sodom aptly illustrates this important message. It seemed the obvious choice for Lot to go to Sodom when he lifted his eyes and

saw that all the plain of Jordan was well watered (Gen 13:10). Yet his attraction to the potential wealth awaiting him had subconsciously blinded him to Sodom's decadence, which led to the subsequent death of his wife and deterioration of his daughters' morals (Gen 19:26; 19:30-38). This story should remain a warning for us today to consider our motives for our decisions. What really attracts us to make a particular choice?

ACCEPT THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE RIGHT CHOICES

If we apply the above principles as we make choices at the crossroads in our lives, we will probably make them in accordance with God's will. We must realize, however, that this is no guarantee of an easy path ahead.

It is critical that as we make the right choice, we resolve to accept the consequences that may follow. Joseph's choice to lead a God-fearing life did not land him in luxury, but rather led to betrayal by his brethren, separation from his beloved father, false accusation by his mistress, and unjust imprisonment. Even the butler, whom he helped in prison by the will of God, forgot about him for two whole years. Yet this was the necessary unfolding of God's will for Joseph and for the house of Israel—and more important, for God's ultimate plan of salvation.

Although Joseph never understood the reason for his suffering when he was in the midst of it, and although he could see his youth and life ticking away in a seemingly meaningless way, he still held fast to the right choice that he had made in the beginning. The lesson for us is to hold on to the right choices we make, even if the immediate consequences seem unfavorable. The story of Joseph encourages us that if we continue to lead a life of close communion with God, we will surely see His great will unfolding before our eyes.

These principles are surely not an exhaustive guide to making choices according to God's will, but they represent some useful methods we can apply when we need to make major decisions. Many people feel lost when facing a crossroad in their lives. This is not because God's will is not evident, but rather because they have waited until they are at the crossroad before they start drawing near to search the will of God, or even because they have a subconscious unwillingness to accept what they already know is the right choice. Hence, the principle of leading a godly life of constant and deep communion with God is critical. It is not the isolated, desperate plea that we make to God that will reveal His will, nor is it the sudden surge in emotions that will help us to follow His guidance. Rather, a constant, deep communion with God will allow us to understand His will when we need it, and soften our hearts to submit to Him. ★

"THY WILL BE DONE,

"Among many Christians, "God's will" has become a popular catch-

phrase. When expecting something desirable to happen, some are

inclined to say, "I am not sure if God would approve of this"; in reali-

ty, however, they are hoping that God will accomplish what they

have already planned. In a situation of decision making, others often

say, "I don't know what God's will is." They imply that if only a sign

would come from God, this divine revelation would expel their

doubts and solve their problems at last. Thus "God's will" has become

a convenient device that covers many Christians' secrets and shields

their uncertainty; it has become a useful expression that absolves

them from awkwardness and excuses them from a lack of confidence.

ON EARTH AS IT IS

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IN HEAVEN"

This careless use of the concept of "God's will," however, raises some serious questions. Is God's will so opaque or mysterious that we Christians have no way to understand what it is? Is it God's purpose that humans remain in ignorance so that He can manifest His divine majesty? If that is the case, then how do we carry out His teachings and become true believers? Further, can we use "God's will" as our guide in every situation? Can it be applied to our personal affairs, or is it more of a general principle by which we conduct ourselves? How do we tell the particular from the general, and what does this distinction mean? These are indeed important questions that deserve our careful reflection.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructs His audience to pray in the right way. He bids them not to "heap up empty phrases," because that is what the unbelievers tend to do and because God already knows what humans have in mind before they present their requests to Him (Mt 6:7-8). Instead, Jesus teaches those who pray to hallow God's name first and then to wish that His kingdom will soon arrive. This wish in prayer is to see God's will quickly done "on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10). Afterward they can ask for such earthly needs as daily bread, peace, and prosperity (Mt 6:11-13). Jesus' instructions here are reinforced by His later statement, "strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Mt 6:33). Here Jesus consciously informs us that God's will and human will are two different things. Although what humans want may not necessarily go against God's wishes, His will is

obviously more magnificent in scope and serious in content.

"God's will" is first and foremost related to the kingdom of God. When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He urgently proclaimed: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mk 1:15). His mission was to fulfill God's will, and so through His teachings he revealed the kingdom of God to His listeners. Jesus worked unswervingly to accomplish the will of His Father, which he was entrusted with (Jn 5:30). He was so devoted to realizing this goal that He eventually sacrificed His life in obedience to God's plan of salvation (Heb 10:5-9).

The kingdom of God represents the state in which God's will and power reign supreme. It is a spiritual realm where only those who observe God's commands can enter and reside. When we pray to God, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," we are wishing that God's truth will dwell in our human world without any hindrance from our selfish desires. And by praying that this state will soon take place, we show our willingness to sacrifice and observe what God instructs us to do.

On one occasion when Jesus' family members went to see Him, He took the opportunity to teach His immediate followers that His true brothers and sisters were those who did the will of God (Mk 3:35; Mt 12:50). It was not Jesus' intention to deny His kinsmen; rather, He wanted to show that to establish a spiritual family is such serious business that only those absolutely committed are qualified to do so. If brothers and sisters of flesh and blood are precious, how much more so are those who constitute the kingdom of God? This level of commitment means that not everyone who calls upon God's name,

God never changed His mind, nor did He ever make His will mysterious; He always wanted His chosen people to obey His commandments and practice them with a spirit of humility and mercy.

or even prophesies or performs miracles in God's name, can enter His kingdom. As Jesus emphatically asserted, "only the one who does the will of my Father" can eventually enter (Mt 7:21).

ETERNAL LIFE

It is God's will to grant eternal life to those who believe in Jesus, as the Gospel of John unequivocally testifies (Jn 6:40). Still, what is the content of "God's will"? It seems that God does not often give divine instruction to an individual with respect to personal matters such as buying a house, choosing a school, or investing in a business. Instead, divine revelation mostly goes to those affairs that are connected to "God's will"—that is, holy work related to the establishment of the kingdom of God. For example, the vision that Peter saw in Joppa instructed him to receive Gentiles as Christians (Acts 10:9-16), and the one revealed to Paul in Troas urged him to spread the gospel to Macedonia (Acts 16:9). But the Bible also mentions spiritual qualities that characterize "God's will," which we as true believers should comprehend. We can take the miracle that happened to Mary, the mother of Jesus, as a good illustration.

When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would bear Jesus the Savior, she accepted God's will with gladness and humility (Lk 1:26-38). Elizabeth, Mary's relative, called her a blessed woman because of her belief and willingness (Lk 1:45). Then, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Mary praised the Lord, describing the great things that God has done for those who obey and fear him (Lk 1:46-55). She pointed out God's great mercy, as He repeatedly took care of Israel according to His covenant with Abraham.

Significantly, this mercy was offered only to the lowly, the hungry, and the poor. God not only never showed His mercy to the proud, the rich, and the powerful, but He even brought His harsh judgment upon them. This seems to go against the common human understanding of what it means to receive God's blessings on earth, but in this way "God's will" opens up a new order that welcomes those humble in spirit, pure in heart, and responsive to God's calling in time of need.

JUSTICE & MERCY

The case of Mary highlights the spiritual qualities that God revealed many times in the biblical tradition. For instance, in reproaching the social ills of his days, the prophet Micah pronounced God's judgment by emphasizing that what the Lord wanted was clear and straightforward: "to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God" (Mic 6:8). And these same social ethics and religious demands had been revealed to the ancient Israelites through the Mosaic laws long before. God never changed His mind, nor did He ever make His will mysterious; He always wanted His chosen people to obey His commandments and practice them with a spirit of humility and mercy. It was humans who twisted "God's will" and made it seem mysterious, in order to cater to their own selfish needs.

In this light, it is important to note that "God's will" essentially refers to justice and mercy, the two attributes that best characterize God's nature—and therefore we should strive in our daily lives to put these concepts into action. The Apostle Paul further expanded the will of God to include "what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2). In other words, we need to recognize and accept "God's will" as those

Jesus testified that He came to serve humanity, not to be served by it... Therefore, if we wish to do “God’s will,” we should humble ourselves and serve others.

things that lead to the establishment of the kingdom of God. Paul encourages us to discern them carefully with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that we can be participants in God’s good work.

VIRTUOUS CONDUCT

“God’s will” not only indicates a spiritual quality but also points to the living contexts that require our moral decision. The author of Hebrews admonishes us to be “complete in everything good” so that we can fulfill “God’s will” (Heb 13:21). He emphasizes the fact that “God’s will” is not something abstract; instead, it is intimately related to our conduct. In First Thessalonians, the apostle Paul pinpoints a number of specific things we can do. He mentions that Jesus has called His redeemed ones to form a special community, which is holy and just. Therefore the believers should abstain from fornication, exercise control over their passions, and behave justly toward each other. These moral requirements are the will of God, and they distinguish us from unbelievers (1 Thess 4:1-8).

Furthermore, Paul lists other ethical actions that fulfill the will of God: “respect those who [labor in the church], [maintain] peace [in the church community], admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted,...seek to do good to one another,...rejoice always, pray without ceasing, [and] give thanks in all circumstances” (1 Thess 5:12-18). These virtues show God’s nature in concrete situations, and they remind us of the importance to be doers instead of merely hearers of the gospel.

Jesus testified that He came to serve humanity, not to be served by it (Mk 10:45). For the sake of God’s kingdom, He even sacrificed His life on the cross (Gal 1:4; Phil 2:6-8). He also instructed His disciples to emulate His example because that was “God’s will” (Mk 9:35, 10:42-44). Therefore, if we wish to do “God’s will,” we should humble ourselves and serve others. That is why at the beginning of every epistle to the church community, Paul always identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ “by the will of God” (1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1). He means that he is God’s servant, called to build the kingdom of God on earth. We need this same humility and willing spirit to serve if we want to qualify as God’s workers in helping to build His kingdom.

Our personal requests to God may be important or even urgent on many occasions, but they may not always be related to “God’s will.” God certainly does not look down upon our reasonable prayers, because He understands

“God’s will” is not something abstract; instead, it is intimately related to our conduct.

our human weaknesses. But our tendency to use “God’s will” as a convenience often trivializes its seriousness. A careful reading of the Bible should give us more insight into

what “God’s will” really means. If we pray to God based on a right understanding and with the accompanying right actions, He will listen to us. As the Gospel of John teaches us, “Now we know that God does not hear sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him” (Jn 9:31). May we all worship God, obey His will, and be participants in His kingdom, on earth and in heaven. ☆

Praying According to God's Will

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“Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us” (1 Jn 5:14).

As Christians, we have the privilege of praying to God, and we all want our prayers to be effective and heard by Him. Jesus promised us that “everyone who asks receives” (Mt 7:8). In order for our prayers to be effective, however, we need to learn to ask God according to His will, not our own. When the twelve disciples followed Jesus during His ministry, they asked Him for many things, but not all their requests were granted. Jesus corrected their direction of prayer and showed them how to pray according to God’s will.

GOD’S WILL IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM

Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (Jn 14:8-9)

Philip had been with Jesus for several years, but he still did not understand who Jesus was and the purpose of following Him. Jesus said that He is the way, the truth, and the life. He told the disciples plainly that they had seen the Father, because Jesus Himself is the exact manifestation of the True God in heaven. Hearing this, Philip earnestly asked for something that most of us would also ask for; that is, he asked Jesus to show him the Father. Philip longed to see something that was tangible. Maybe he expected Jesus to manifest the glorious image of the Father, just as the prophets saw Him in the Old Testament.

Sometimes our faith, like Philip’s, is dependent on things that are visible. Our faith is strong when we witness a miracle, see glorious light during prayer, or experience a loving member taking care of us. When we see all these positive things, our faith seems to improve greatly. Therefore, we always ask for things that are visible in order to strengthen our faith. We always want to see something new, hear a new teaching, or experience some other exciting thing to stimulate our faith.

As our faith continues to grow, it is His will that we ask for the fullness of the Holy Spirit and internal peace that transcends all understanding.

Jesus did not encourage this attitude of prayer, however, because if our faith is dependent on visible things, we will one day be disappointed. Rather, Jesus pointed out the truth that He is in the Father, and the Father is in Him. The disciples could only understand this profound truth by elevating their focus from visible things to the level of faith and spiritual eyesight, so they could understand that “it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell” (Col 1:19).

Are our prayers today often focused on asking Jesus to show us something that we can see? We may ask God to change the environment so we can experience His abidance and existence. But as our faith continues to grow, it is His will that we ask for the fullness of the Holy Spirit and inner peace that transcends all understanding, so we can have the strength to move forward by the power of understanding the truth.

And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. (Jn 14:16)

Human will asks to see the Father’s glory; God’s will for us, however, is to ask for the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:9-13). So let’s not complain about the difficulties we may be facing. Rather, let’s pursue the fullness of the Holy Spirit to help us fix our eyes on Jesus. Then we will discover that He is the way for all human problems, the truth to solve any doubts, and the life for all dying and hopeless souls.

GOD’S WILL IN OUR RELATIONS WITH OTHERS

Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare

for Him. But they did not receive Him... And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?” But He turned and rebuked them, and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.” (Lk 9:51-56)

Human emotions and the external environment often influence our prayer. We tend to pray earnestly for those who love us; however, we may also pray that God will discipline those who mistreat us. After James and John saw that the Samaritans did not receive Jesus, they prayed according to their own will, asking for Jesus’ permission in their impulsive and fleshly prayer. They were very frustrated by the Samaritans’ rejection and wanted to prove their authority by requesting the fire of heaven to consume them.

We often commit similar mistakes. When we are mistreated, rejected, misunderstood, or attacked, we tend to pray to God to show His righteous judgment and vindicate us. We may ask God to teach someone a lesson so the person will know his or her mistake. We may be impatient with someone and start to ask God to use heavenly fire to change, refine, and reshape that person’s character.

These kinds of prayers are common, but they are not according to God’s will. What did Jesus say about these kinds of prayer? He rebuked the disciples and told them to review the manner of their spirit—without even mentioning the inhospitable Samaritans! Jesus’ compassion allowed Him to focus on the needy people in the other villages and to look beyond the fault of the Samaritans. His response shows us the best example of the inner peace and strength that leads to the ability to forgive.

“Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the wicked” (Prov 24:19). When we ask for revenge and judgment from God (like asking for fire from heaven), our hearts are often filled with anxiety and frustration. Of course, we can ask God to show His vindication and righteous

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judgment, but it is His will that we ask for the ability to forgive and forget. "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses" (Mk 11:25).

It is time to stop pointing fingers at the faults of others. It simply does not help our spirituality. Instead, it is time for us to check the "manner of our spirit." Is it full of hatred, revenge, frustration, and anger? Or is it filled with love, patience, kindness, and forgiveness?

GOD'S WILL IN OUR SERVICE TO HIM

Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him... She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom." But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask... to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father." (Mt 20:20-23)

Humans tend to desire higher status in an organization, because to worldly people that signifies achievement and success. Therefore, the mother of James and John came to ask Jesus for her sons' career advancement in the future, hoping that the right and left position beside Jesus in His kingdom would secure their positions and ensure their superiority over the other disciples. Authority and status, however, are not spiritual pursuits. Jesus corrected her by saying "You do not know what you ask."

Do we know what we ask? When we ask God to give us more gifts is the reason so we can better do His work, or is it because we want to be special and feel superior to others? Do we know that the true meaning of advancing in the heavenly kingdom is to go "downward"; that is, to humble oneself to serve others, and to learn from Jesus' example of humility?

Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mt 20:26)

In the past, we may have asked Jesus for special gifts or opportunities to do His work, when actually it was to gratify our own desire for glory. But it is God's will that we humble ourselves to do His work. To faithful servants of the Lord, the status, title, and job content of holy work are not important at all. The only thing in their minds is to complete their duty so God's will can be accomplished.

Jesus said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Mt 9:37-38). This is truly the prayer of a man of God. Who does which task and who receives which reward is not important for the worker of God; the only important thing is that the harvest is reaped. So let's not ask God to let us do things according to our own will; instead, let's learn from Paul and say, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10).

IN CONCLUSION

"Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (Rom 8:27). The way we pray will affect our spirituality. May we all learn from the mistakes of the disciples and learn to ask according to God's will. If we submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he will intercede for us according to God's will. This kind of prayer will give us inner peace so our relationship with God and with other people will be renewed, and the strength of our ministry will be refreshed. ★

Finding Your Other Half



Terry Chang—Chicago, Illinois, USA

I sometimes catch the light dancing off the golden circlet around my ring finger. As I pause to look at the wedding band, I remember once again just how God, out of His love for us, brought my other half and me to each other. Our journey to matrimony was filled with a deep sense of wonder and joy from seeing God's guidance.



But certainly, there were times when I felt unsure. At the early stages of getting to know each other, I questioned if my other-half-to-be was the right one. In the years before our paths had even crossed, when I was single, I wondered, “Has God really prepared a partner for me?” Or when I felt infatuated with someone from time to time, I struggled with my confusion: “Could this person be the one?”

“How do you know who is the one?” Many people who are in the process of finding their other half ask this all-too-familiar question. Let me pass onto you what I have learned from my own journey and from others who have graciously shared their wisdom with me along the way.

TURNING TO GOD AS THE FIRST STEP

I cannot tell you how many times I have heard the advice over the years, “Seek God’s will in finding your spouse,” and dismissed it as irrelevant. For many years, I saw myself as the owner of my destiny, particularly when it came to love, dating, and choosing the right person to marry. At first it seemed absurd to me to consider God in the process. I thought, “If I do not need God to choose my friends, why do I need Him to choose whom I like, date, or eventually marry? I have enough good sense to know who is right for me.” I knew what I was looking for in a man. So finding my other half seemed only a matter of waiting for the one who met my criteria and going with my gut feeling.

But it was not that simple. No matter how much a guy appeared to be a good catch, something always seemed to be missing. For reasons I did not know initially, I could never feel completely sure about someone. Of course, I could be swept off my feet by someone’s intelligence, good looks, athletic ability, high morals, or charming personality. I could even envision a wonderful life to come based on what I knew and saw. But I could never be sure of what tomorrow might bring or how someone might change in several years. Would his endearing qualities become intolerable with familiarity and routine? Would unexpected life-stress somehow poison the way we see each other? Would he really remain true and devoted for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, in an age when divorce or separation is becoming the rule, not the exception?

Over time, I realized that my criteria for today could not guarantee happiness for a lifetime. I could not see into the future to know whether I was making a foolproof

decision at the start. It became clear that the reason I could not feel certain about someone was because God was missing from the equation. Only God can see and know the future. Without divine guidance and approval of my steps, it was no wonder I could not be sure if someone was truly right for me today, tomorrow, and beyond. After many years, I finally understood why it is so important to turn to God for guidance as the first step in finding the right person.

PUTTING GOD’S TEACHINGS FIRST

Knowing the importance of seeking God’s will first does not automatically translate into knowing God’s will. Just because I asked God for guidance did not mean that I suddenly received enlightenment from above. God was out of my reach, and first I had to learn to draw myself closer to God before I could detect His will. The Scripture states plainly, “Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 1:9, NIV). Apostle Paul also wrote, “And do not be

conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2).

Clearly, whether or not we can have God’s abidance and guidance in the process of finding our other half has everything to do with our obedience to His teachings. Think about the seriousness of these verses—we do not have God if we do not live by His teachings! We would be walking in total darkness and have no chance of seeing His guiding light. How important it is, then, to follow the desires and standards of God, not those of this world, so that we may

be within reach of His will!

It took me a long time to recognize that I was using a secular mindset in searching for a spouse, which was not biblical. I thought that what I was looking for was completely good and natural. After all, everyone around me lived by these standards. Who wouldn’t judge beauty by outward appearance, define love by feelings of attraction, or determine compatibility based mostly on personality factors? Who would think it so sinful to “broaden our options” by looking for a match outside the church?

But God’s standards are different. “For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sam 16:7). God sees purity, reverence, and “the incorruptible beauty of a

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gentle and quiet spirit” in wives as more valuable than beauty from any outward adornment (1 Pet 3:2-4). In addition, the scriptures remind us that love is more than just a feeling we have; it is part of the spiritual fruit we cultivate with the help of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). We are able to love in a complete sense only when God abides fully with us. God repeatedly instructs His believers to keep holy and be separate from unbelievers. He considers it detestable if we indiscriminately intermarry with unbelievers out of our passion alone.

In order to draw myself closer to God, then, I needed to examine for the first time the attitudes and values that I had grown accustomed to. It meant learning humility so I could let go of my preferences and let in God’s teachings. It also meant learning more about God’s teachings so I could know what the correct way is. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). Finding the right person became finding the person with whom mutual giving of spiritual support and encouragement “to do good works” is possible; it was no longer about fulfilling my wish for romance and a good worldly future.

It was not until I was willing to look for a spouse in a manner that pleases God that I could begin to sense God’s abidance and guidance. Make no mistake about it: putting God’s teachings above our own desires in our search for a spouse may be one of the most painful and challenging experiences in our lives. But we know that we will not undergo it in vain because when we resist the devil, submit ourselves to God, and come near to Him, He will come near to us (Jas 4:7-8).

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

Throughout the Bible, we see repeatedly how God guides His people with His Spirit. It seems clear, then, that prayer should be our key to understanding God’s will. Indeed, in their ministry to preach the gospel to all people, the apostles always received clear guidance from the Holy Spirit, which led them to do certain things but stopped them from doing others. But this kind of guidance seems magical, almost unreal, in light of how frequently we are confused about God’s will today, especially in our search for our other half. It is puzzling that the Spirit of God that dwells within us today is the same one that guided the

apostles two thousand years ago with such power and conviction. What happened to the power and conviction? Why do we often pray and yet not understand God’s will?

Consistency. It does not take much effort to see how our life of prayer differs from that of Jesus and the apostles. Jesus fasted for forty days and nights in order to attain power from above and closeness with God. From day to day, He lived a consistent life of prayer. Likewise, the apostles prayed frequently, fervently, and often in one accord. We, by contrast, only manage occasionally to have even one fervent prayer. Most of the time, our prayers consist of a few words of hurried thanksgiving before meals and a short, tired monologue before we drift off to

sleep for the night. No wonder we get no answer when we pray. How can we receive anything from God if our line of communication to Him has been severed due to our laziness and spiritual stupor? Therefore, reestablishing and strengthening our lifeline to God should be our highest priority, even before we begin the process of looking for a spouse. Without that strong, direct channel of communication with God, we cannot know His will for our match.

A Clear Mind. It is not enough simply to spend a certain amount of time in prayer each day. When it comes to matters of the heart, praying with a clear mind can be a tough and necessary challenge to overcome. “Should I call him or wait for him to call?” “She looked at me in a certain way, so does that mean something?” “I have never felt so much in love before. Is this a sign of approval from God?” On and on, the questions

may surface in our mind. Our prayer ceases to be a dialogue with God, but instead becomes a confusing, emotion-filled self-babble. The Bible exhorts, “Be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray” (1 Pet 4:7, NIV). Sometimes, we may need to pray first for strength to control our minds and to keep our feelings in check so that our prayers can be fruitful.

Faith. To receive anything from God, we also need to pray with unwavering faith. The Bible speaks about the importance of having faith when we pray: “But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:6-7, NIV). It may be difficult to maintain our faith in God’s providence if we have waited

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for a long time without seeing any hints of something promising. It may also be challenging to await God's answer with unwavering faith when we don't know what His response will look like. His answer may come in a vision, a dream, or a direct revelation through an extraordinary event. But it may also be less concrete, as in a conviction we sense in our heart. How, then, can we know God's will?

Interestingly, Jesus did not teach His disciples the different secrets to understanding God's will. He simply instructed them to pray for the Holy Spirit and that when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide them into all truth (Jn 16:13). Filled with the Holy Spirit, the apostles did know God's will very clearly throughout their ministry. Therefore, rather than concerning ourselves with how God will reveal His answer to us, we need to believe fully that the Holy Spirit is our Counselor and will guide us into the truth concerning God's will for our marriage. With this faith, we ought to pray for complete indwelling of the Spirit and prepare ourselves for instructions from the Counselor.

As much as we need to pray and approach God with faith, we also need to respond to God's guidance with faith, in order to understand who is the right one for us to marry. It takes faith to follow God's will to begin or continue with a relationship even though we initially feel reluctant. "Do not put out the Spirit's fire" (1 Thess 5:19, NIV), the Scripture warns. We may need to follow the will of God against our preferences by learning to trust fully in the Lord and to wait patiently for the goodness of His plan to unfold over time. Maybe that very quality that we dislike so much in a potential match will actually help us, in time, to recognize our own shortcomings and intolerance. We would not find out unless we follow God's lead in faith.

BE THE RIGHT PERSON

Most of us approach marriage by asking if someone is right for us. We prefer to find someone who meets our criteria and can make us happy. Interestingly, nowhere in the Bible does God instruct men to look for a spouse with particular traits, or women to seek a certain kind of marriage partner. The focus instead is always on ourselves, not our other half. The Bible teaches husbands to love their wives as their own body, and to sacrifice themselves for their wives as Christ did for the church. This teaching is given as a standard that husbands should require of themselves. Likewise, wives are to submit to and respect

their husbands as the head of the family. This is an attitude that wives should cultivate within themselves, not one that they impose on their husbands.

This focus serves as a sobering reminder for us all. As much as we should seek God's will in leading us to the right marriage partner, we should also place the critical eye on ourselves, not our potential match. We should ask if we have those qualities that we seek in our other half. Do we possess gentleness? patience? Do we place spiritual qualifications before earthly ones? Do we forgive easily? Do we make it our life's goal to glorify God in everything we do? It is no coincidence that God does not teach us to demand that our spouse treat us in a certain way. No one could ever be the right person for us if all we did was demand and criticize, but not give. It is by giving first that we can inspire our spouse to respond by giving. It is by giving first that we can begin the loving cycle of unselfish caring, and experience profound intimacy, joy, and wonder with our other half. It is by giving first that we can continue to be the right one for our mate and experience him or her as the right one for us.

How do you know who is the one when you look for your other half? Some people rely on their gut feeling. Others go with their rational sense. And there are those who are never quite sure and forever wonder, "Is this the one?" or "Have I married the right one?" Struggling to find my own answer, I saw no clarity to this enigma until I realized that knowing who is the one has everything to do with knowing God. It was that simple and that complicated at the same time. A simple notion, yes. But it took me a lot of time and effort to learn that to truly know God means knowing what it takes to get close to Him. It means knowing what we need to do to understand His will and guidance in our marriage. It also means putting into practice all that we know and believe with unwavering faith so that we will recognize the right person as our other half.

Adam needed no special explanation from God to know immediately that Eve was "the bone of his bones, the flesh of his flesh." We, too, will respond with the same certainty, joy, and wonder when we at last recognize God's guidance in leading us to our other half. ★

"Love & Marriage" seeks to address and provide biblical advice on a wide range of questions and issues related to dating, singleness, and marriage. If you have any comments or suggestions for this column, please write to love.marriage@tjc.org.

COMMITTING YOURSELF TO CHRIST

Maintaining God's
Guidance and Abidance
throughout
Your College Years

Angel Marie Solgot—Seattle, Washington, USA

It wasn't easy making it into the school of her choice, but Danielle did it. The Ivy League school she had always dreamed of attending would take her a couple of thousand miles away from family, church, and friends, but the invitation to this school was her dream come true, and she wasn't about to turn their offer down. Her parents, though very proud of their daughter's accomplishments, couldn't help but feel concerned about her future.

They worried: "Will she be safe on her own? Will she have to face loneliness? Will she end up finding a boyfriend, and will they be able to keep their relationship pure? Most important, will she still be able to hold onto God and her faith through all the temptations and stresses of college?" Sending their daughter off to a place so far from church and home gave them a feeling of total helplessness. All they could do was hope that their daughter would hold steadfast to her faith in God, and pray that He would keep their daughter in His tender care throughout the spiritually critical four years to come.

COLLEGE: THE GREAT EXPLORATION

The above story is one that Christian parents know and fear very personally, and it's one that many of us who have made it through our college years understand only too well. College is a tremendous exploration in so many ways. It's an exploration of the world around us that we make through our studies of science, language, history, mathematics, humanities, and so much more. It's also a terrific study and exploration of mankind that we engage in for better or worse, depending on the people we encounter. It's an exploration of a newfound freedom, especially since our parents don't have as much control over our spending, our curfews, our daily activities, and our friends as they once had. It's an exploration of our abilities to take care of ourselves financially, physically, and emotionally. And, most seriously, it's an exploration of ourselves in terms of who we are and where we really stand with our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet if we aren't careful, in just four years of college study a lifetime of learning and growth through religious education classes, church participation, and daily communion with God can wind up placed in the attics of our hearts, becoming long forgotten and unused. We know this danger very well, but how can we

make sure that it doesn't happen to us? How do we keep our faith, love, and service in Christ at the forefront of our college lives?

THE KEY TO HOLDING ON

Let your eyes look straight ahead, And your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, And let all your ways be established. (Prov 4:25-26)

While we're exploring and making our way through college, the key to maintaining and increasing our relationship with our Lord and Savior is to strive to maintain purpose and balance in our daily lives. As we prepare to enter the college world, there are three critical commitments we must make to ourselves and to our Lord Jesus Christ:

1. Select a college or university that will best affect our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Build up a support group of brothers and sisters in Christ.
3. Give first priority to our faith in, relationship with, and responsibilities to Jesus Christ, regardless of the obstacles and distractions that may come our way.

When we strive to uphold these three commitments to ourselves and to Jesus Christ, we are able to view situations and make decisions with strong spiritual insight and discernment.

Commitment #1: Choose Your School Wisely

In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. (Prov 3:6)

Here are some typical questions that college-bound students usually consider when deciding on a college:

- ◆ How does this school compare to other schools in terms of its reputation?

- ◆ What is the tuition? Will I be able to afford to go to this school?
- ◆ How far is it from home?
- ◆ Will I be able to afford housing and other expenses?
- ◆ What kinds of programs does this school offer, and is my major one of them?

All college-bound students generally have to consider the above questions when deciding on the right college or university to attend, but Christian college-bound students have additional issues to consider:

- ◆ How far from home and church is this school? Will I be able to make it to Sabbath services every week?
- ◆ Is there a campus fellowship established by our members there?
- ◆ Are there other brothers and sisters that I can regularly meet up with at school, or will I be pretty much on my own for the next four years?
- ◆ What could happen to my faith should I become distanced from Sabbath worship and brothers and sisters in Christ?
- ◆ Are there things that I can do to prevent myself from slipping in my relationship with Christ while I'm at school?

Making the decision to attend a school away from home and church is difficult. After much prayer, and after weighing all of the answers to these questions, we may decide that, while the school we originally had our heart set on offers much in terms of academics, it does not offer much opportunity to receive spiritual companionship and guidance through the church and its members. As careful Christians, we may have to make the tough decision to narrow our search to schools closer to a church. In other words, we may seriously need to make a conscientious sacrifice in order to benefit our relationship with our Lord and Savior. And as careful Christians, we need to keep our com-

mitment to God first and foremost when making this decision.

As we all know, however, it's not always possible to study at schools near our churches or its members, especially when such schools don't offer the programs we need or want to pursue. In this case, it is even more important for us to entrust our cares to God and to make our decisions about attending a far-away school through a deep reliance on God's help. We also need to begin searching for ways to keep God in our daily lives, even though our circumstances might distance us physically from His fold.

Commitment #2: Build and Maintain a Strong Support Group

...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb 10:25)

I grew up in Tampa, Florida, and ended up attending the University of South Florida—a school just thirty minutes from home—for my undergraduate studies. I wouldn't say that I chose USF because it was the best school to attend to earn my degree in elementary education. And I can't say that I never considered moving away

my mother told me that I couldn't go away....

Although I sometimes wished I had gone away for school, I also knew that it was indeed best for me to stay at home with my family and the new worship group. Looking back, I realize that I truly wasn't ready to go away for college—my faith was much too young to handle the temptations and stresses. After growing up away from our churches because of our highly mobile life as a U.S. Air Force family, I had very limited exposure to our faith and a very limited knowledge of God and the Bible. How could I have handled the pressures of college at the young age of seventeen, and without a very strong background of faith? If I had moved far from a support group of believers, how could I have kept myself strong in Christ? My mother knew what was best for me, and I am so thankful to our Lord Jesus for giving her such a strong spiritual love for me.

My family and the local believers in Christ became my support group during my years of college, teaching, and then graduate school in Florida. I believe that the experiences in Christ that I was blessed with during my days with the church in Tampa are what sustained me through my years of studying.

Whether you choose to go away

from church, make the commitment to maintain contact with other brothers and sisters through the Internet, letters, or phone calls.

Commitment #3: Give Greatest Priority to Your Relationship with God

And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 Jn 2:17)

The final commitment we must make to ourselves and to our Lord Jesus Christ is the commitment to keep our relationship with Him first and above all else. It's not easy, but it is always the most beneficial commitment to make in the long run.

In Matthew 16:25-26, Jesus teaches us:

For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?


This is a teaching that we always have to hold onto, especially when we face those extremely difficult college exams, struggle through those challenging and rigorous classes,

The final commitment we must make to ourselves and to our Lord Jesus Christ is the commitment to keep our relationship with Him first and above all else.

from home in order to gain greater experiences of being on my own. In fact, during my high school years, I had thought quite a bit about moving away for college and gaining my independence. But in the end, though my friends were all going to colleges out of state or out of town, I decided to stay in Tampa and be close to my family and church. After all, I had a four-year-old brother I couldn't bear to leave; our worship group was just beginning to form there, and was in strong need of workers; and, well,

or stay home for college, it's important for all believers to establish their own support groups during these critical years. If you go to a school close to church, be sure to remain active in worship services and church activities—make that commitment. If there are other members of our church attending your college, establish a campus fellowship—make the commitment to your group and to God to work together to keep each other strong in faith. And if you find yourself at a college far away

meet our new groups of friends, take on that part- or full-time job as a student, or find that special someone. It's so easy to accidentally set God aside when we become so busy with everything that campus life involves. Much too often, without even knowing it, we find ourselves drifting further and further away from God because of our preoccupations with our studies, work, and friends. That's why, from the very beginning, we must plan a course of action to main-



tain a healthy relationship with Jesus Christ. We must make the determination to carry out the following preventive measures to ensure the stability of our faith:

Remember to pray to God at least two times a day: once before you begin your classes, and then once before you turn in. Use this time to really communicate with God your trust, thankfulness, and openness to what He has set before you. Ask Him to open your heart to feel how much He is a daily part of your life. Place your concerns on Him, and acknowledge that He is your heavenly Father, wanting only the best for you, His child.

Remember the Sabbath, and keep it holy. If you are near a church or other brothers and sisters, make a deep commitment to keep the Sabbath by attending services or gathering for Bible study and fellowship. Don't allow other activities or distractions to pull you away from keeping God's holy commandment. Schedule that dentist appointment, make those camping plans, and postpone that shopping spree to the local outlet's big sale for another day or for later in the evening. Your commitment to God comes before that big half-off sale or that trip to have your hair cut.

But while most of us know to avoid these obvious distractions, there are a couple of others that commonly pull us away from keeping the Sabbath: working and studying. Too often, we become trapped in our weakened fleshly bodies and give in to the pressure to go to work or to study for that huge exam on the Sabbath, rather than attend church or Bible study. Hebrews 4:9-11 warns us:

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did

from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.

We must try to avoid working or studying on the Sabbath—it is a holy day to be set aside for God and for our own spiritual rejuvenation.

Establish healthy and godly relationships around you. Be very cautious about the friends you keep, relying on the Holy Spirit to guide you into friendships that will benefit your faith. By establishing ourselves as Christians, and by presenting our values and beliefs to others through our daily actions, it will become almost automatic for us to weed out common temptations and pressures from peers. And it will be almost automatic for Christians, or those seeking Christ, to be drawn to us.

We must live in the world, but we must not be totally like those of the world. If we find that our relationships with others are causing us to sin or become distanced from our

We must live in the world, but we must not be totally like those of the world .

beliefs, we must learn to pull away from these friendships immediately. At times, it's really difficult for us to realize that our actions are becoming ungodly or that we are drifting further and further from Christ; that's why we must rely on regular Sabbath attendance and sermons, daily prayer, and the believers we keep around us. These critical components of our faith can draw us back to God through self-reflection as well as through loving corrections by brothers and sisters in Christ.

IN CONCLUSION

Wherever we go and in whatever we do, we must always remember to keep our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ at the forefront of our lives. We must make this commit-

ment to ourselves and to God, so that we are always able to discern God's will in our lives, and so that we may always remain in Christ's love and salvation. In Colossians 1:9-14, Paul wrote to his brothers in Christ at Colosse:

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

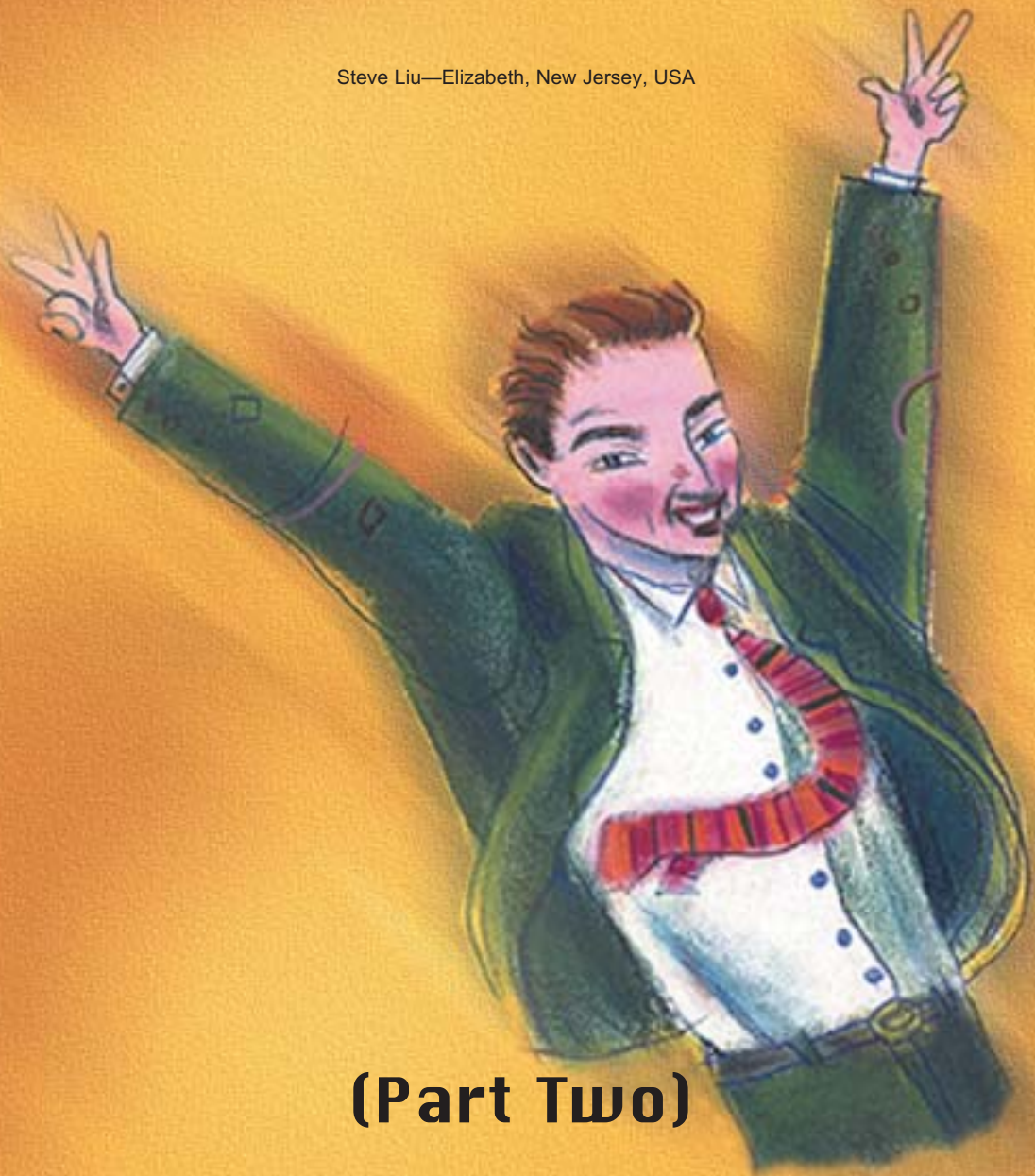
Let us consider this message from Paul as every Christian parent's

prayer for a college-bound child, and every believer's prayer for a college-bound brother or sister. May you be filled with the knowledge of God's will through spiritual wisdom and understanding. May you live a life worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in every way. May you bear fruit for the Lord. May you endure and patiently walk in your studies with Christ. May you always remember to honor and give thanks to Him. And when all is learned and done, may you receive your inheritance in the kingdom of light. ★

"On Campus" seeks to support and inspire an active faith among our youth through candid discussion and exploration of the many challenges facing Christians on campus. Please send comments on this article or questions about student life to on.campus@tjc.org.

THE SIX HABITS OF REALLY EFFECTIVE CHRISTIANS

Steve Liu—Elizabeth, New Jersey, USA



(Part Two)



In my last column I introduced the Six Habits, a collection of handwritten advice that my Dad scrawled on an 8.5 x 11-inch sheet of typewriter paper. While my title is a shameless rip-off of a business bestseller, the tips are uniquely Dad's. They're nuggets of wisdom from a man who had a highly successful thirty-year career, and yet who at the same time took care of his family with love and spent much time in the service of God.

The first tip was about getting along with others: "One enemy would be too many. Be appreciative and congenial." But there are times, even when you're doing good and being the best person you can be, that people will still wrong you. What do you do then? Well, Dad covered this situation with the second tip on his list:

- 2) Never get mad. If somebody is not nice to you, have a lot of patience. This is the time to practice being a good Christian.

The moment you start doing work that involves dealing with other people, you'll have many wonderful opportunities to start making enemies. All of us have different backgrounds, different values, and different things that drive us. And when we aren't in complete agreement with others, discord usually sets in. Sometimes we handle it well, but inevitably we'll face situations where we have enemies. And before you say that a Christian shouldn't have any enemies, consider that nearly every good person in the Bible, including Christ, had them.

HUMAN STRATEGIES vs. GODLY SOLUTIONS

I took a project-management class at my company once, and one of the topics was "Conflict Management." These classes have it down to a science: to deal with conflict, you "Compete, Avoid, Accommodate, Collaborate, or Compromise." You need to choose a conflict-management

strategy based on the particular situation you're in, although there are positives and negatives to each approach. Every individual has patterns of motivation that cause him or her to interact with others: some combination of "altruistic-nurturing," "assertive-directing," or "analytical-autonomizing." These classes typically have a lot of catchy mnemonics and use lots of fancy, made-up words like "autonomizing" and "synergy."

And yet after the classes are over, even though you can usually recognize the unhealthy interactions and behaviors that go on around the office, you still can't do anything about them. That's because, try as you might, human processes and strategies sometimes can't solve spiritual issues.

Paul gave this advice:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom 12:17-21)



One of the key phrases in this passage is, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you.” You can’t control what other people do, but you can control yourself. Keep a clear conscience.

Why? Read 1 Peter 3:16-17: “...so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”

One of the best ways to defeat an enemy is to do good

an eager new employee, I went out of my way to help the company. I did my job to the fullest. On top of that, another project was under a deadline to be delivered, and since I had some expertise in that area, I stepped in and voluntarily gave up my own time to help do some work on that project.

There were rumors that the upper management was very impressed with my work. One day, one of the higher-ups came in to our location, but I happened to be in a class that day. When I got out of the class, I found out that the colleague of mine who sat in the desk across from me was given—and accepted—

the credit for the work I had done. And in all his discussions with the manager, my name was never even mentioned.

He was given a promotion, a nice job, and his own office. To add insult to injury, the job he got was pretty much my dream job, one that I was uniquely qualified to do! And in the meantime, my own job became more and more tedious and thankless.

So I had a choice. I had every right to publicly accuse this person of taking credit for my work. I could have stormed into the boss’ office and made a scene, and I would have been justified. Most of my colleagues knew full well what really happened, so I could have rounded them up as witnesses to accuse the one who took credit

for my work. But I didn’t.

Now, I didn’t sit back and just take it, either. I wrote

an e-mail to the manager who had promoted my colleague. It wasn’t a scathing letter, nor did I accuse or complain. But, in a very Christian way, I told her objectively and professionally my feelings about what had transpired. And through it all, I took great pains to show respect—for this manager, for my colleague, and also for myself. Before I did that, of course, I prayed that God would give me the wisdom to be genuine.

As is my custom with this type of e-mail, I waited twenty-four hours, read it over again, and then sent it off. But I heard nothing back for months.

It hurt. Bad. In my mind I tried to comfort myself by

One of the best ways to defeat an enemy is to do good to him after he’s gone to great lengths to make your life difficult.

to him after he’s gone to great lengths to make your life difficult. In reality, it’s nearly impossible for someone who doesn’t believe in God to do this. In a world where God doesn’t exist, the rule is survival of the fittest. If someone hurts you, you hurt that person back, taking special care to make sure that you hurt him more than he hurt you. If you don’t exact revenge, others will perceive you as weak, and you’ll lose credibility and power.

Someone with God in his or her heart, though, has a different perspective.

Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil. For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land. A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace. (Ps 37:5-11)

The same blessing applies to us: “Do not be afraid, for I am with you.”

DAD’S TIP—PUT TO THE TEST

Strangely enough, only a few months into my job, I had the opportunity to put Dad’s second tip into action. Being



repeating over and over again the story of Isaac and the wells, which I've heard at so many Student Spiritual Convocations.

Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen and said, "The water is ours!" So he named the well Esek, because they disputed with him. Then they dug another well, but they quarreled over that one also; so he named it Sitnah. He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, "Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish in the land." (Gen 26:19-22)

When the Pharisees came up to Jesus and tried to goad Him into saying something rash or losing His temper, He invariably replied with a soft answer. He had every right to shout and scream. He was accused of doing miracles through Beelzebub. He was accused of cavorting with "tax collectors and sinners." He was accused of brazenly breaking the traditions of the elders and the Law. But each time, He chose to reply with patience and without resentment. And each time, the Pharisees were left speechless and frustrated.

In my few years at my company, this sort of thing has happened to me several times. Each time, I responded with meekness. And each time, the person who wronged me ultimately ended up with egg on his face. Or, to use the Bible's term, "burning coals."

Meekness is not the same as weakness. Mr. Webster

When Pharisees came up to Jesus and tried to goad Him into saying something rash or losing His temper, He invariably replied with a soft answer.... And each time, the Pharisees were left speechless and frustrated.

defines meekness as "enduring injury with patience and without resentment." It's a choice—one that arises not out of a lack of one's own power, but from an abundance of God's power and complete trust

"Isaac was a chump," I'd grumble.

Well, if you read on in that passage, you'll find that Isaac went up to Beersheba that night, where the Lord appeared to him and reminded him of the blessing He had spoken to Abraham. The same blessing applies to us: "Do not be afraid, for I am with you."

Of course, I'm no Isaac, but a funny thing happened. A few months later, that manager was about to leave her job. But she did one last thing before she left: she gave me a call to tell me that my coworker wasn't working out in his new job. He was struggling, and she regretted the decision to promote him. She asked if I would like the position, and I accepted. A little while later, the coworker gave me a call. He acknowledged that I was the right person for the job. I ended up doing that job for a few years, and doing it well.

If I had ranted and raved back when the offense took place, I would have lost the respect of everyone. But the fact that I kept quiet, when everyone knew I had every right to rant and rave, showed character.

that God is there and knows what He's doing.

Paul's advice in Romans 12:20, which he quotes from Proverbs 25:21-22, sums up what all the fancy corporate training courses could not: how to truly resolve a conflict. The next time you encounter a situation where you are slandered, misrepresented, or plain taken advantage of, try putting Dad's advice to the test. Repay evil with love. Then sit back, and let the Lord do His work. ☆

"In the Workforce" is a recurring column in Manna dedicated to survival tips and advice on how to shine the light as a Christian at work. If you have some advice or anecdotes from your own work experience that you feel may be edifying to the fellowship of brothers and sisters in Christ, please send it to workforce@tjc.org.

A MOTHER'S PLACE: AT HOME OR AT WORK?

Alice Jung—El Monte, California, USA

“To work or not to work?” This has been a constant debate in my mind recently, as another “bundle of joy” soon arrives. My husband and I are excited to hold that tiny, wrinkly, cuddly baby, to smell its milky scent, and to admire another wonderful creation of God.



At the same time, we are not sure if we are ready to handle the added financial responsibilities that come with this new life. In addition, I sometimes ask myself, “Did I go to school all those years just to be buried in endless dishes, dirty laundry, diapers, and other household chores?”

Up until now, I thought I was sure that I had made the right choice in becoming a stay-at-home mom. I have read research suggesting that children who have close bonds with their stay-at-home mothers (or fathers in rare cases) tend to grow up to become more well-adjusted adults. I have witnessed how young children whose mothers stay at home tend to be more obedient than children who go to daycare. I myself have also reaped the fruits of joy and pride that come from staying home with my firstborn.

Yet something nudges inside me once in a while, particularly when I hear how “successful” some of my former college friends are, making me question, “Is this what life is all about?” They have respectable professions and seemingly happy families. Why do I sometimes feel embarrassed instead of being proud when I confess that I am a stay-at-home mom?

Thus begins my quest to decide whether “to work or not to work.” In my search for an answer, I came across questions such as: Do other mothers struggle like me? What does the Bible say about a mother’s role in the family? And how can I live my life in a way that will glorify God the most?

WHY STAY AT HOME?

The Bible does not really tell us specifically what is best for mothers. However, the Bible does tell us what is important to children: “Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov 22:6). God also instructs parents to teach their children the words of God in their daily

lives (Deut 6:5-9). So, how can a family best accomplish the above two requirements? The best alternative is for mothers to stay home with their young children to instill the teachings from the Bible. Of course, mothers who work away from home can also find time to teach biblical values to their children. Nevertheless, we must admit that it is most likely easier for stay-at-home moms to spend more time with their children in anything than mothers who work away from home.

Recently, I stumbled across a book entitled *Mother in the Middle*.



To my surprise, two Christian authors, Deborah Lewis and Charmaine Yoest, describe how all the women they interviewed struggled with the same dilemma I am facing right now. They called the book *Mother in the Middle* because so many mothers are caught in the midst of a dilemma: the desire to spend more time with their children and the need to work away from home. Many working mothers feel guilty every time they leave their children to go to work, and they never seem to feel content with themselves even though they are doing the best they can to support and care for their families.

The authors also describe the complete transformation of some “career-minded” women, once they realized what motherhood meant to them. These women were willing to

give up the professional positions that they had worked so hard to attain, and to make drastic cutbacks or changes in their lifestyle in order to spend more time with their children. Not surprisingly, the mothers who made a conscious decision to stay home with their children, despite the “sacrifices” they made, were the happiest of all the groups of mothers that the authors interviewed.

It is absolutely essential that we mothers have a clear understanding of motherhood. The most satisfied mothers that Lewis and Yoest interviewed were those who considered their work as mothers to be their “greatest work” and “the most important thing” they will ever do. One mother said, “I consider putting loving, caring, responsible adults into our world to be a greater accomplishment than anything I could ever do as a high-powered executive of a major company.” This sense of mission motivated them to build their support systems, to rearrange their priorities, to find creative solutions to financial problems, and to focus on the joys of children.¹

THE CONTRIBUTING MOTHER

Becoming a stay-at-home mom does not mean that you are no longer free to do anything else that is productive. If we look at the Bible’s description of the ideal wife in Proverbs 31:10-31, we can see that while she took care of the family, at the same time she managed to help with the family finances and contributed to society.

She knew how to work with wool and flax. She provided food for her family and her servants. She bought land. She planted a vineyard. She traded successfully. She could weave and make garments and bedding both for her family and for profit. She oversaw the affairs of her household. She helped the poor and needy. Her husband and children held her in high regard, and she was praised as a woman surpassing many others who did noble things (Prov 31:29).

What does this mean to us today? It means that while our first priority should be to raise godly children, we can contribute to our family and society in other ways as well. Understanding that each of us is in a unique situation, I would like to share some workable possibilities that I have discovered in the course of my research, which might be helpful for other mothers too. In their book, Lewis and Yoest have gathered some strategies that those “mothers in the middle” have used, and I find them to be very helpful references.

Taking One Thing at a Time

The philosophy behind this strategy is that you can have it all—just not all at once. Consider that both Sandra Day O'Connor, U.S. Supreme Court justice, and Jeane Kirkpatrick, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, stayed home when their children were small.² Children's advocates tell us that the first five years of a child's life can greatly impact the rest of his or her adult life. Therefore, many women choose to put their careers on hold until their young children reach school age.

Volunteer Work

Just because you're a “stay-at-home mom” doesn't mean that you can't also be a contributing member of your community. Many organizations, especially nonprofit ones, rely heavily on mother-volunteers. They help out with schools, churches, food banks, homeless shelters, teen pregnancy programs, etc. Although volunteer work does not pay, it is real and valuable work that enriches the lives of all those involved.

Continuing Education

Some mothers enrich their lives by learning or studying while at home with children. Some take night classes; others attend seminars and workshops in order to pursue a long-time interest. Now, with the help of technology, it is possible to take classes at home via the television or the Internet.

Home-Based Business

For several of the mothers that Lewis and Yoest talked with, motherhood was the turning point that forced them to do something creative, steering them into new entrepreneurial careers. Some mothers ran home-based daycare centers. One mother ran a mail-order catalog business out of her basement; another designed and marketed greeting cards; another was a published writer; one mother sold Amway products; and one had a home-decorating business. Some former teachers tutored students on weekends and evenings. And there are many other opportunities for those interested in working at home.

The Part-Time Solution

Some mothers found part-time work to be the optimal solution because they could stay at home with their children and still keep their profession part-time. However, not every workplace can accommodate part-time work, so it is sometimes necessary for mothers to change their careers in order to work at a job that allows them more flexibility.

Tag-Team Match

In one family, the husband and wife worked at different shifts of the day so that one of them would always be home for their children. This couple seemed to enjoy the arrangement, but it is not a very common one, because not many people enjoy working night shifts.

Finding a Support Group

A great majority of the most contented mothers made connections with other moms on a regular basis. Some found support through their churches, others through La Leche League, and others through mother-oriented groups like MOPS and MotherCare.

Husband Support

It is impossible for women to be successful mothers without the support of their closest partners, their husbands. Just as in a healthy marriage both partners must strive for a common goal, so it is in successful par-

enting. Both parents must recognize the importance of raising well-adjusted children and be willing to make the sacrifices and adjustments that make it all possible. Indeed, all of the most contented mothers that Lewis and Yoest interviewed said that the most important thing contributing to their happy motherhood was the strong support of their husbands.

Leah Lampone, former Milwaukee County circuit judge, left the bench after fourteen years to come home and care for her children. She said, “Looking back upon my years as both judge and mother, I have come to realize the greatest impact I have made in any life is that which I've made in the lives of my children.”³

Finally, what does all of this mean to me? I learned that there are many mothers who feel as confused and frustrated as I do; who feel the pressure from society's expectations and from their family's financial needs. I learned that the Bible values the role of mothers as important contributing members of the family. And I also learned that there are actually many options that allow me to be an involved mother and a fulfilled individual at the same time.

Looking at my toddler daughter proudly displaying her drawing of a happy face, I am amazed at how quickly she has grown. Soon she will be going to school, going to college, and eventually having her own family. I realize that life is short. “But childhood is shorter. And motherhood is the one road, if not taken, to which we can never return.”⁴ ★

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1. Deborah S. Lewis and Charmaine C. Yoest, *Mother in the Middle* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), p. 219.
 2. Brenda Hunter, *What Every Mother Needs to Know* (Oregon: Multnomah Books, 1984), No. 52.
 3. Ibid, No. 61.
 4. Lewis and Yoest, p. 236.

“Family Altar” is dedicated to providing practical, biblical insight for parents who face the challenge of raising a family in today's fast-paced and variant society. Please direct comments on this article or questions about parenting to family.altar@tjc.org.

LETTERS FROM MOM



Honey,

If there's a hymn that you'll choose to hide in your heart as you begin the next phase of your life's journey, then I hope you will pick "My Jesus, As Thou Wilt!"

This hymn is a prayer from the heart of an eighteenth-century pastor who was restricted by the church-state to attend to the believers' needs in the best way he knew how. Despite these difficult circumstances, Benjamin Schmolck gave of his best to the flock, praying and singing, as he went about his life's work, that the Lord's will may prevail.

Reminds you of our Lord's ministry, doesn't it? When Jesus stepped forward to fulfill His life's purpose, His teachings shook up a society that had lived and died according to what the Pharisees—a select group of Jewish people—determined was acceptable or not. Because they had learned from the bitter history of previous generations that had turned away from God, this group of Jews wanted to get it right for themselves and for future generations. Unfortunately, by tagging new rules and regulations onto the Law that God had given to Moses in the days of the Exodus, they were trying too hard. Anyway, being so fiercely devoted, the Pharisees abhorred Jesus and His teachings. In their eyes, Jesus was only a carpenter, a mere tradesman who made and repaired ordinary implements for everyday use. As far as the Pharisees could see, Jesus was breaking every rule in the book. The man even claimed to be the Son of God! From this background, the Pharisees, as a group, watched Jesus and waited for the opportunity to rid Him from their society.

To say that the Pharisees gave Jesus a hard time is an understatement. Nevertheless, our Lord stayed focused and motivated. He understood that God's will must prevail at all times. He never forgot that He had been ordained to live and die to atone for the sins of the world, so that every person will have access to eternal life. Jesus

also never forgot that, in the short time He had to preach and to teach, He had come to show by His example that the correct way to worship God was to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

This hymn also makes me think of Paul. You remember Paul, don't you? He was also a Pharisee, a teacher of the Law. The Bible introduces him in that scene where he was watching the stoning of a Christian named Stephen. You could tell that Paul would have none of this teaching that contradicted his!

This incident occurred after the Pharisees had seen their wish come true and Jesus had been crucified. But what they did not know was that eliminating Jesus from Palestine would in no way create the perfect Jewish society of their dreams. If anything, their plans backfired because after Jesus died and was buried, He resurrected from the dead, just as He had said He would. Thereafter, for about forty days, He appeared to His disciples. Then, after He had returned to heaven and the Holy Spirit came on the disciple—as Jesus had promise—even more people converted to Christianity.

Paul did not like what he saw: a chosen people were turning their backs on the God of their forefathers! In his zeal, Paul set out to save his people from their folly. When Christians fled the country, he went after them.

But one day on the road, a bright light suddenly shone from heaven. In an instant, Paul was on the ground. Then he heard our Lord call out to him.

You know the rest of the story. What this hymn reminds me today is that when Paul finally understood God's will for him, he took that zeal which God had endowed him with and put it to good use for our Lord. Turning his back on a life of power and prestige, Paul dedicated the rest of his life to our Lord and became the apostle to the Gentiles.

Traveling the known world outside of Palestine at that time, Paul preached that nothing and no one could save a person, except his or her faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who had lived and died for the sins of every man, woman, and child.

Anyhow, as the book of Acts and Paul's epistles testify, there is more to his ministry than what I can fit into this letter. But even though the money was not there, the hours were long and erratic, working conditions were dangerous, and Paul never really knew whether he would be warm and full one day or cold and hungry the next, this apostle stayed focused and motivated right up to the moment when he was executed by the authorities.

The cost of obeying God's will is high. Though but a young person, you know this to be true. You will also find this to be true when you step into the future. I know that you are aware of this because you have already read in the gospels that the world will hate Christians on account of their faith in Jesus Christ. Paul, too, had written of terrible times that shall come in the last days.

Nevertheless, I want you to remember that Jesus had warned that when those times come, many Christians will turn their backs on Him and walk away with the intention of saving their own lives. But then again, I know you have already read that this is not a strategy our Lord recommends. In fact, He recommends the opposite—that when terrible times come, you remain faithful and He shall help you defend your faith.

That is why I hope you'll hide this hymn in your heart. Where you are going, there will be joy and sorrow. In this mix, you will find tears and laughter. But be it one or the other, I hope you'll know to always prayerfully sing, "My Lord, Thy will be done."

Love,
Mom

Written as a mother would her child, "Letters from Mom" addresses the struggles of our young people as they step toward the threshold of adulthood. This column hopes to encourage, comfort, and urge the youth to continue living as children of God. Please send comments or questions to this.mom@tjc.org.



LOST AND FOUND

Steve Liu—Elizabeth, New Jersey, USA



"I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice." (Eze 34:16, NIV)

A few years ago, I was taking care of a dog for a friend of mine. She was a cute dog, and I loved her to pieces, but she liked to run. I was staying at my friend's house, and one day I came back to find a hole in the fence. The dog was gone.

You'd think I would have gotten angry at the dog, but any anger I had was overshadowed by my fear. Now this dog wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed. I was afraid that she might have run into traffic, or that she was wandering lost and afraid, hungry and thirsty. Maybe the dog was in the pound, and would be gassed.

Well, I walked all over the place looking for her. I knocked on people's doors, and I walked for miles and miles calling her name. There was no response. I called the animal control people. They hadn't found her, but they said they'd call me in the morning if they did. I stayed up until 3 A.M., walking around the neighborhood with my flash-

light. Someone else had posted a sign of another lost dog. The sign was a month old, and it was fairly clear that if the dog hadn't been found by this point, then it probably never would be.

In the morning, I got a call from the animal control people. Someone had called in to say that he'd found the dog, and had kept her in his house overnight.

I ran over to this person's house. He had her on a leash, and when she saw me her tail started wagging wildly. I called her name and she came running to me.

I had a strange mix of emotions at that moment. I was angry at the dog for running away, and I did scold her with a few words. But I couldn't stay angry for very long. It was just such a relief to see her back, and safe. So I gave her a big long hug, and by the looks of her wildly wagging tail, she seemed genuinely relieved to see me again too.

All the Bible stories and parables about the lost share a common theme. God Himself promised to search for the lost sheep of Israel and bring back the strays, bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. The father of the prodigal son saw his returning son in the distance. This means that every day, as his son was wandering, the father was standing and looking off in the distance, waiting for him to return.

In the parables of the lost coin and the lost sheep, the return of the lost thing was greeted with joy and celebration. God is not a God who only punishes. He is a God who loves, and whose anger is superceded by His love for us—so much so that He left His glory two thousand years ago, came to earth, and gave His life for us so that we'd have the chance to return to Him.

All of this points to one thing: if we are truly willing to return to God, He will run to us, throw His loving arms around us, and take care of us. His anger is for a moment, but His mercy is for a lifetime. ★

God is Everywhere

The light, light comes from heaven
God is everywhere.

There, here, He is with me,
God is everywhere.

O God, where is God? On earth,
He goes around and round me,
God is everywhere.

God cares about me, is happy and sad with me
even though He is so great,
God is everywhere.

God's path is with me, guiding me
God is everywhere.
Forever amen.

(Jan 9, 2000)

Shine in Me


Shine in me, clean up flesh—
no more sin come into my spirit.

Shine in me, shine in me,
My fear is no more from darkness.

Shine in me, shine in me,
don't come close to my sin.

Shine in me, shine in me,
wake up my eyes, shine in me.

(Nov 13, 1999)



Poems written by Shan-Li Lei
a Deaf sister from Pacifica, California, USA

Don't Worry

Hallelujah, don't worry,
In our daily life, day and night
God will see us.

Don't worry, in our sickness
God will heal us.

Don't worry, heaven and earth,
God will lead us, anywhere we go.

(Oct 2, 1998)

Close to Me

One day, the light comes in
everywhere, God is close to me.

My faith will not fall if I keep away
from sin, God is close to me.

Prayer and Bible study keeps me busy,
I vow, God is close to me.

The light comes in and touches
my heart, God is close to me.

No other church, no other Bible,
no other gods, God is close to me.

(Jan 7, 2000)