

MANNA

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**Unworthy of God's Grace • From Seeing to Believing
Important Steps in Building My Marriage**

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Great Is God's Faithfulness

Daniel Chu—Pacifica, California, USA

I thank God that I can share His great mercy and blessings. Life is sometimes difficult, and we may face dire situations. But God's word tells us that He's always by our side, helping us walk this path.

In mid 2007, when I was living in Taipei, I had a chest exam to inspect some flu-like symptoms I had been experiencing. During the exam the doctor asked me, "Hasn't anyone told you that you have a congenital heart defect?" I was surprised because I had never been told that I had a heart problem. I had only recently felt some discomfort in my chest.

After several tests, the doctors confirmed that I had a condition called partial anomalous pulmonary venous return. Normally, the pulmonary vein brings oxygen-rich blood from the lungs to the heart, and this blood vessel is connected to the left side of the heart. However, in my case, the pulmonary vein

was connected to the right side of my heart.

So for forty years, my heart had been relying only on the right side to pump blood. The doctor was very surprised that I had lived so long with this condition. Congenital pulmonary venous defects are usually detected and treated during infancy.

I was basically functioning with half of a heart, and, as a result, my blood oxygen level was quite low. The doctor told me that people with such low levels of oxygen are typically unable to walk or sing and suffer from frequent fainting. But I had never experienced any of these problems.

The doctor was amazed and said that it was a miracle that I had lived so long without suffering any of these symptoms. However, now that my condition had been discovered, it was necessary to have surgery to connect the pulmonary vein to the left side of my heart.

FACING DOUBTS

God's Compassions Do Not Fail

After flying to San Francisco for further exams and follow-up, my wife and I decided to have the open heart surgery at the University of California, San Francisco. My surgery was scheduled for March 3, 2008, a Monday. The operation would involve cutting my heart in half so that my pulmonary vein could be rerouted from the right side to the left. The shortest distance was through the middle, which was also the fastest and safest method.

As with other open heart surgeries, the operation would involve stopping the blood flow to the heart and lungs and sending it through a heart-lung machine, as well as stopping my heart from beating. The surgeon told me that my surgery carried a much higher risk than other heart surgeries and that it was possible I would not survive the operation.

I took time off from work after the surgery was scheduled, and I started to wonder why I even needed to go through surgery. God had protected me for forty years already—why wouldn't He continue to protect me?

Everyone, Christian or not, wants to receive healing and recover from illness. We want peace and a trouble-free life, but difficulties are part of life. I had a lot of questions and doubts as the day of surgery approached.

On Saturday, March 1, I saw the sermon title "Great Is Your Faithfulness" when I stepped into the chapel. God moved me to understand that this was the answer to all my questions. During the sermon, the speaker cited Lamentations 3:22:

*Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed,
Because His compassions fail not.
They are new every morning;
Great is Your faithfulness.
"The LORD is my portion," says my soul,
"Therefore I hope in Him!"*

When I read this verse, I felt peace in my heart. And my prayer that Sabbath morning was very strong and full of power. My worries disappeared as I was filled with the Holy Spirit.

My heart was still satisfied and joyful when I got home after Sabbath service. However, as I was showering that evening, I suddenly felt a strong cold wind blowing. My body was covered in goose bumps. It was strange because the bathroom didn't have windows and the door was closed. When this wind blew upon me, my mindset changed.

This thought entered my mind: "Why don't you give up? This God is not worthy of your belief. You keep His commandments and worship Him in His church, but He still hasn't protected you. Just give up."

As I heard these words, I started to think, "Yes, this is true. I'm quite pitiful." At this moment, another voice told me, "God is faithful. His compassion will not

leave us. We must hold tightly onto God and He will never fail us." Then I thought, "Yes, this is correct."

Within three seconds, I had heard three voices: The first told me to give up on God, the second told me that God is faithful and that I should trust in Him, and the third was my own voice. So I decided to trust in God, and the cold wind disappeared.

The next afternoon at four o'clock, I felt moved by the Holy Spirit to kneel down and pray. This wasn't a time that I normally prayed, but I knelt down and prayed because of this compulsion. I was filled with the Holy Spirit. I later found out that there was a group of brothers and sisters in Vancouver who were praying for me at the same time.

Although we didn't know it at the time, the Holy Spirit compelled us to pray to prepare for the forthcoming spiritual battle.

Entrusting My Life to God

That evening, around seven, I gathered my family to pray for strength before my operation early the next morning.

During that prayer, I again felt a cold wind surround me. As it swirled around me, I heard the thought, "This God is not worthy of your belief. You should just give up. How did you get to this point? It's a difficult and pitiful path. Just give up."

I wanted to live, to receive healing and be healthy. I knew that God wanted me to give my burdens to Him. Yet, I had such a hard time letting go because I had so many thoughts of "What if?" And God and Satan both knew I needed more faith.

I was still worried about the risks of the surgery and how my situation was even

more complicated than typical open heart surgery. But because of my experience the previous evening, I knew that I needed to entrust my life to God when I started to doubt again. I prayed loudly to God with the help of the Holy Spirit.

I told God, "I entrust my life to You. No matter what I will face, I know that what You do is right." The moment I truly entrusted my life to God was when I learned the hardest lesson of my life.

When I faced a life-and-death situation and handed my life to God, He sent angels to comfort me. During the prayer, I saw hundreds of angels surround me, and I knew that God was pleased with my prayer. These angels protected me from the cold wind—it was still there, but I was shielded from it by the angels that were around me.

I realized afterward that Satan wanted me to feel doubt and fear. I believe that when we concentrate on our difficulties and allow them to take over our thoughts, we lose sight of what we should be focusing on—entrusting our problems to God. To be victorious, we must remember God's faithfulness and banish fear and doubt by relying on Him.

PEACE AMIDST DANGER

On March 3, I was wheeled into the operating room at 6:00 am. By the time I was aware of my surroundings, it was 2:30 am on March 5.

When I woke up, my first thought was, "Where did all the people go?" I didn't know the day or time and was not aware that I had just woken up from a very vivid dream.

While I was unconscious, I saw a beautiful green pasture, where thousands

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of brothers and sisters were praying. There were so many of them it was impossible to count. It was a beautiful scene.

I moved close to one member and asked what they were praying for. He told me, “We are praying because we are about to fight a spiritual battle. We are waiting for God’s time.” I asked, “May I join this prayer?”

I found a space to kneel down and pray with them. When I started praying, I realized that they were all praying for me. I had no concept of time while I was in this dream, but it took place while I was unconscious for almost two days.

While I was enjoying my time praying with other brothers and sisters and being filled by the Holy Spirit, I was unaware of the two critical moments I had endured physically.

God’s Mercy

During surgery, everything had gone according to plan. After completing the rerouting of my pulmonary vein, I was taken off of the heart-lung machine and my heart started beating again.

However, my heart was not beating regularly. The top half and bottom half of my heart were beating at different rates. Because the left side of my heart had been inactive for forty years, it was very small and weak. And because the blood vessels on the right side had been working extra hard for forty years, they were enlarged and pumping too much blood. So my heart was not able to beat correctly.

The surgeon’s backup plan, in case the planned surgery did not work, was to put a device in my heart to regulate the heartbeat, but I would have to rely on the device and medications for the rest of my life. At that moment, when he had to decide what to do, he had an inspiration.

They stopped the blood flow, put me back on the heart-lung machine, and stopped my heart again so that the surgeon could correct the irregular heartbeat. Instead of putting in a device, he enlarged the left side of my heart and made the blood vessels on the right side

If God opens our eyes, we would see that He is always there fighting for us in spirit. We may be suffering physically, but God is leading us through battle in the invisible spiritual realm.

smaller. Then, they started the blood flowing again, and my heart started beating regularly.

The surgery lasted twice as long as expected because of this complication, but it was a success. The surgeon told me later that he didn’t know how he came up with the idea to enlarge the left side of my heart and narrow the blood vessels on the right side. It was a spur-of-the-moment decision.

Everything truly is in God’s hands. During a critical moment, while I was unconscious, without prayers for this specific situation or my family’s awareness, He inspired the surgeon according to His will.

The surgery was completed at 1:30 pm, and I was sent to the intensive care unit (ICU) to recover. At 5:00 pm, my wife was about to leave the ICU and take her dinner break when several doctors suddenly ran to my bed. She heard the heart monitor beeping and was told that my blood pressure had suddenly dropped very low, which was of grave concern after heart surgery.

While they worked to stabilize me, my wife sent out a prayer request to the church because the doctors said my situation was dangerous. They did not know why my blood pressure had dropped and could only monitor me and wait for me to recover.

Thank God, after one hour everything was back to normal and I was fine.

Peace from God

Two days later, when I became conscious, I realized how God gives us peace when

we are completely helpless and unaware. While I was unconscious, unable to think or feel, I was going through a dangerous time physically. Yet spiritually, God allowed me to enjoy prayer together with others. It transcends what we can understand.

God gives us strength even when we have no understanding, feeling, or memory. The people around us are aware—they see that the situation is dangerous and they worry and are afraid. But for me, the one who was going through these critical moments, I was actually unaware. I was going through a battle of life and death, but God gave me peace in spirit. This is a very important understanding of faith.

The evening of March 5, the first night I was conscious after the surgery, I felt that I was unable to go on. Despite the painkillers, I still felt a lot of pain from the incisions each time I took a breath. I knew that I was breathing, but I felt no air coming in. It felt like I was suffocating.

At that time, Lamentations 3:22 and the hymn “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” came into my mind. Immediately, I felt much calmer, even though I still had trouble breathing. I remembered the lyrics of the hymn and how they described God’s faithfulness. When I heard the melody and recalled God’s mercy and love, I felt great peace.

After this, I started to recover quickly. On March 7, the doctor removed the chest tubes, which had been placed to remove excess blood after the surgery, and I went home the next day.

FAITH AND TRUST IN GOD

When I got home, I realized that normal activities were quite difficult. Simple things such as smiling, turning on the tap, drinking water, and talking on the phone were all so hard to do. I experienced how an illness can make us appreciate how great a blessing it is for us to be able to perform everyday activities.

That first night back at home, I was reclining on the couch because I was still too weak to lie down on a bed. Suddenly, I saw three dark figures appear before me. In the past when I heard testimonies about members seeing evil spirits, I always thought that trying to scare people this way was a very old-fashioned tactic.

When I saw the spirits, I understood what they were. Miraculously, I was not afraid at all.

The three figures gave me the same message that I had heard before the surgery: "Just give up. What's the point of struggling? Don't you see how difficult it is for you? If you give up, we will take you away. You'll be happy, okay?"

At this point, I was so weak from the chest pain that I couldn't speak. So I thought in my heart, "Don't touch me, I have God." Although I hadn't spoken out loud, they understood my thought and told me, "Then cry out loud. But you can't even speak and you're calling out to your God?"

As they said this, one grabbed my neck, one pushed my back, and the other pulled my legs. They said, "Let's go. Just give up." I summoned all my strength left and said, "God, please save me." The three spirits disappeared.

After this appearance they never bothered me again. Their message was clear: They wanted me to give up. Whether through a thought, fear during prayer, or by appearing before my eyes, their message was for me to give up.

When we go through difficult times, we sometimes do just want to give up. But God wants us to trust in Him with all our heart and soul. Hard times are a process, not the conclusion. We will pass through and overcome.

It is difficult to battle constantly before we reach the end. But we must show God how much faith and trust we have in Him. He has already determined the result, when He will be with us forever. What He wants is for us to prove our faith during these difficulties.

I experienced God very deeply throughout this period, but, even more, I understood that I had to share with brothers and sisters that God is real. The Holy Spirit is always strengthening us, especially in matters of life or death, and it happens not only when we pray by ourselves but also through the intercession of others.

Most of us probably don't spend much time interceding unless we know the person very well. But even brief intercessions are very effective. When I saw the vision of thousands of members praying for me, I believe that it was a representation of all the people who had interceded for me.

Every prayer, no matter how short, truly comes before God. If God opens our eyes, we would see that He is always there fighting for us in spirit. We may be suffering physically, but God is leading us through battle in the invisible spiritual realm.

I hope that, when we share God's beautiful blessings, we all remember what God wants us to learn in our faith. God truly strengthens us step by step. We may not see Him with our eyes, but He tests our faith by what we can see and feel.

God is faithful. Through trials and tribulations, God always wants us to learn and to be rooted more deeply in faith. Be courageous and trust in Him, for He is always with us. ★



God Revealed His Church to Me

Lawrence Chin—Sabah, Malaysia

ACCEPTING CHRISTIANITY

I grew up in a household with parents who believed in traditional ancestor worship, although they did not impose these beliefs on me. They sent me to Christian missionary schools as a child, and it was through this channel that I was exposed to Christian doctrines from a young age.

In high school, I even chose Bible study as my religious study subject. When I attended college, I joined Christian youth mission activities and accepted Christianity.

I went on to pursue higher education in England, and it was there that I was baptized into the Baptist Church in 1980. I was quite active in youth fellowships and church activities.

I believed in the Lord's salvation for mankind as it was spelled out in the Bible; however, at times I still doubted my own salvation. Before I received baptism, I was taught that, to accept Christ, I simply

had to pray to Jesus and tell Him that I believed in Him and ask for Him to forgive my sins. Saying these words meant that I had accepted Christ and the Holy Spirit would then dwell in me.

However, after receiving baptism, I didn't feel the presence of the Holy Spirit within me. I didn't speak in other tongues as the early believers did when they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4). The churches I worshipped in also did not experience many signs and miracles, as the early church had (Acts 5:12, 16).

But since I accepted Christ in the Baptist Church, I did not think to look for a different church that prayed in tongues and performed signs and miracles. After completing my studies and returning to Malaysia in 1982, I continued to worship in the Baptist Church.

RESISTING MY WIFE'S CHURCH

In 1986, I married a member of the True Jesus Church, and she tried to bring me to

her church. However, I tried to convince her that my church doctrines were in accordance with the teachings of the Bible and that her church was wrong.

My wife prayed and tried very hard to share the gospel with me, but I was adamant in my resistance. I had been taught at my church to believe that the True Jesus Church doctrine was a deviation from the truth. I did not want to give in to my wife because I felt that I was correct.

However, because the nearest True Jesus Church congregation was two hours away, I usually drove my wife to church and attended service with her despite my reservations about the doctrines and beliefs. Over time, I observed many positive qualities of the church. I noticed that the believers were fervent in their prayers, many signs and miracles occurred, and the church grew in size.

Yet these observations were not enough to change my view. I still insisted that my church was the right one and that the True Jesus Church was wrong. I continued to worship at the Baptist Church whenever I had the opportunity.

THE TRUE CHURCH OF GOD

In August 1992, I had a very bad bout of the flu. I was concerned that I might pass this on to my wife and our young daughter so I decided to sleep in another bedroom. That night, I had a vivid dream.

In the dream, I saw two churches. On the left side, I saw my church and recognized many church members who were standing in front of the entrance. On the right side, I saw a chapel with the name "True Jesus Church" on it and a large group of its members standing in front of it. I didn't recognize anyone there.

The two churches were separated by a road. It looked straight and extended all the way back until it disappeared into the horizon. Above the churches, the sky was bright and a cloudless blue.

The members of both churches were engaged in a debate over which church was the true church. They were shouting across the road to emphasize their points. This went on for quite some time and seemed very real to me.

All of a sudden, a loud voice from above said, "The True Jesus Church is the true church of God." At that moment, I realized that I had been wrong in my opinions and judgments on which church was the true church. Even though I was still asleep, I had a strong compulsion to submit to God, ask for forgiveness, and worship Him.

When I opened my eyes, I saw bright rays of light shining on me from one

corner of the ceiling before they quickly disappeared.

CONFIRMED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

I was wide awake. I felt compelled to kneel down and pray, so I did. To my surprise, I was praying in tongues. After the prayer, I noticed the time was 1:34 am.

Even though I initially believed that the voice I heard was God, I started to have doubts. Over the next few months, I frequently pondered what the dream meant and why I had it. I wasn't sure that the dream was from God and wondered why He would reveal things to me in this way.

I continued to pray and attended service a few times at True Jesus Church, but there was no progress in overcoming my doubts or in speaking in tongues. Therefore, I kept the dream to myself and didn't tell my wife about it.

In December 1992, I brought my family to Australia for a holiday. On the last leg of our trip we stayed with my wife's relatives, who were members of the True Jesus Church. We went to church with them on the Sabbath, and I decided that I would ask God to reveal to me whether the dream was really from Him.

During the first prayer session, I asked God to give me the Holy Spirit to prove that the revelation I received was true. To my surprise, I was able to pray in tongues again. I felt a warm stream flowing from my shoulder to my legs and there was inexpressible joy inside me.

My heart was overwhelmed with joy and gratitude to our Lord Jesus that He would reveal Himself to me in such a meaningful way. I had received the Holy Spirit and believed with my whole heart

that the True Jesus Church was indeed God's true church.

Receiving the Holy Spirit as confirmation of my dream dispelled all of my lingering doubts and allowed me to fully believe in the doctrines of the church. I was baptized three months later.

I am very grateful to the Lord for speaking to me and bringing me to His fold in such a wonderful way. He knew my hard and stubborn nature and helped me come to my senses and realize which church was His. Otherwise, I would still be a lost sheep wondering in the wilderness, unable to recognize the voice of the good shepherd, our Lord Jesus.

May all glory be given unto our Lord God almighty, Jesus Christ. ★

All of a sudden, a loud voice from above said, "The True Jesus Church is the true church of God." At that moment, I realized that I had been wrong in my opinions and judgments on which church was the true church.

Unworthy of God's Grace

HH Ko—Heidelberg, Germany

ILLNESS AND TRIALS

I attended the 2009 World Delegate Conference (WDC) in Malaysia. I was scheduled to be there for ten days, from March 24 to April 2, taking part in meetings and the conference, but I don't recall anything that happened during that time. Afterward, people told me that my behavior during the conference was strange: I had trouble walking, spent a lot of time resting, and did not greet others.

I woke up on April 1 in the hospital, with two holes drilled in my head. That's when I realized that I had been operated on. I didn't recall giving authorization for surgery, but the members who had rushed me to the hospital told me that I had signed all the paperwork.

They told me that they had taken me to the hospital for a full examination because of my odd behavior. When the hospital took a brain scan, they realized that one-fifth of my skull had filled with blood, displacing my brain so that it was

pushed over to one side. This hospital was not equipped for brain surgery, so they had to send me to Malacca Hospital an hour away.

My situation was critical and it was possible that I would pass away en route to Malacca Hospital. Church members notified my siblings in Taiwan of my condition, and they rushed to Malaysia that day. My sister told me that they had been prepared to take my body home.

I'm very thankful for all the brothers and sisters who prayed for me during this time, especially the WDC attendees who stayed up late to pray for me. The two holes in my skull were drilled so that the blood in my brain could be drained. I had to stay in the hospital until I recovered from the surgery, but I didn't know the full extent of my condition because the doctor was too busy to talk to me.

On the fourth night of my hospitalization, I started to reflect on my illness. Pastors often encourage us to

reflect on anything that may have caused difficulties and problems in our life, and we were taught in theological school to be careful of greed, pride, and lust. So I thought about whether or not I had done something wrong.

But after examining and reflecting, I still could not figure out a reason for my illness, so I just accepted the fact that I got sick. All of a sudden I heard loud noises that seemed to be coming from the next room.

Normally, I am not that disturbed by loud sounds. For example, if someone near me snores very loudly, I just try to breathe along with him instead of becoming angry, and I'm soon asleep. But I wanted to find out where the sound was coming from because the noise made me nauseous.

From my reaction to the noise, I knew that it was a spiritual disturbance, possibly from Satan. I had witnessed the work of Satan and cast him out before, but I had

never personally experienced disturbance by him.

I wanted to go look around and see if there was anything causing the noise, in case it was mice or something else. I needed to make sure that it was the work of Satan.

It was around 8 pm, and I had an intravenous (IV) line and a urine bag, so I had to bring them all with me as I walked slowly to the next room. It took me thirty minutes to get there, and, when I opened the door, I saw that it was an empty shower room. I didn't know what was in that room because I hadn't been allowed out of bed after the operation.

I turned each tap closed, very tightly, even though none of them were leaking. After I got back to my room, I could still hear loud noises and still felt nauseous. I knew that it was a demon that was disturbing me. I decided that it wasn't worthy to be cast out by Jesus' name because His name is precious and shouldn't be carelessly used. So I said, "Cowardly demon, I'm ignoring you." And the noise went away.

The next day, at around 8 pm, I felt a presence, a power in the room, but I wasn't afraid. I said, "What do you want?" And I felt it run quickly to my feet.

Suddenly this demon was tugging on my blankets, trying to pull them off of me. I held onto the blankets tightly so that they wouldn't get pulled away. I wasn't about to let this demon take away the four blankets that I had especially requested from the nurses, so I cast him out in the name of Jesus. And he left.

After this second visit from the demon, I knew that it was my turn to go through trials and personally experience the work of Satan, but I wasn't afraid.

GOD'S GRACE AND PROTECTION

I was discharged from the hospital on Friday, April 10, nine days after my surgery. The next day was Sabbath, and the local church asked me to give a sermon. I went up to the pulpit and told everyone not to worry about me while I

testified about my experiences over the past few days.

My head was still wrapped in bandages when I went up to speak because the two holes drilled in my head had not yet completely healed. The deacon who invited me to speak was afraid that I would faint, so he sat in the first pew in case anything happened.

A brother who had ear surgery a year earlier was worried for me when I went up to speak and started to get a headache. He later testified that he saw a vision while I spoke. He saw five angels, as tall as the chapel, surrounding the pulpit where I was standing. Two angels stood in the front of the pulpit, one on each side, each holding a large book. Two angels stood in the back, one on each side, each holding a staff. And one angel stood behind me, in the middle, holding a sword.

After he saw this vision, his headache disappeared and he wasn't worried anymore because the angels were watching after me. Nothing happened to me that day or the next day when I spoke during a special seminar. I believed, as everyone else did, that I was fine and there would be no more problems.

The two weeks I spent in Malaysia after my operation were truly because of God's grace. I could not fly back home to Germany after I was discharged because the left hemisphere of my brain needed time to recover its normal shape. The blood that had built up in that part of my brain had pushed my brain out of place, and I was left with an empty space where the blood had been. There would be pressure problems if I went on a plane with a partially empty skull.

My wife came to take care of me, and we stayed at the unoccupied house of a church sister after I was discharged from the hospital. Thank God, my wife and I were able to experience a second honeymoon while I recovered.

We rarely had time for long conversations, but for two weeks we had a lot of time to talk, and we talked about everything—about our youth, the

present, even our future and how to take care of our affairs once we passed away. We would sit and talk for many hours at a time, and I still think about this time fondly.

After two weeks, the doctors allowed me to fly home. I left Malaysia believing that my illness was behind me and that I had made a full recovery.

UNEXPECTED RECURRENCE AND DOWNTURN

I went for a checkup at Heidelberg University Hospital on May 15, one month after I returned to Germany. After a computed tomography (CT) scan, the doctor told me that I couldn't go home because my brain was again filled with blood and they had to operate that day.

Two more holes were drilled in my head to drain the blood. Unlike my first hospitalization, I remembered everything clearly: I dressed myself before going in for surgery, I shook hands with the anesthesiologist and the surgeon, and I was able to remember everything after I woke up.

The surgery went well, and my recovery went smoothly as well. On May 18, the third day after surgery, the doctor told me that I would be discharged the next day. That night, around 8 pm, I was getting ready to sleep when I suddenly felt a force behind me.

This was the third time I felt this presence, but it didn't say or do anything other than watch me. I felt it staring at my back. I ignored it, but it wouldn't leave, and the feeling of being watched for a long time started to annoy me. I got angry and cast it out in the name of Jesus.

I was lying down in bed and saw it run away through the corner. It was the first time I had seen a demon, but I can still picture it very clearly. It had a small pointed head and a tail like a broom, and I was surprised at the color because it wasn't dark like it's usually depicted, but more of an olive green color.

After it left, I slept very well that night. When I woke up the next morning, I thought that everything was well and that I would be going home that day.

The doctor came in at 11 am to remove the drainage tubes in my head. The doctor told me to prepare for pain, and I steadied myself for pain of a level of ten, but it was at a level of eight. He finished removing the tubes at 11:30 am and left.

After the doctor left the room, I suddenly felt great pain in my head. It was many times more painful than the level of ten that I had prepared for earlier. It felt like someone was squeezing my brain in his hand. I had never felt pain of this scale.

I turned in bed to try to get rid of the pain, and then I felt my brain being squeezed two more times. Then I lost consciousness.

When the nurse brought my lunch at noon she found me lying in bed unresponsive. They took another CT scan of my brain and found that there was a mixture of brain matter, blood, and other brain fluid in my skull, which the doctor later described to me as a “blood cake.” I was taken in for surgery.

The doctors were unable to figure out what had happened because I was cleared for discharge that day, but then I suddenly lost consciousness and had a “blood cake” in my brain. The surgeon had to cut part of my scalp and lift it off like a flap, then cut through my skull and take off part of the skull to look at my brain.

When I woke up after this operation, I had some difficulty moving the right side of my body and could not speak clearly. Even though I went through physical therapy over the next couple of days, my condition didn't improve and actually deteriorated until I was completely paralyzed on my right side and unable to speak intelligibly.

The doctors decided to operate on me one more time to see if they could find out what was wrong.

UNABLE TO SPEAK

Before my second major brain surgery, the doctor told me that, if I was lucky, I would be able to speak my native language after the operation. He explained that the mother tongue is deeply ingrained in the brain, and subsequent languages are copied into the brain. The languages learned later would be lost, but I would still be able to speak my mother tongue after surgery if I was lucky.

My second surgery took place on May 22. When I woke up afterward I was completely paralyzed on my right side. My wife, eldest son, and daughter came to see me in the intensive care unit (ICU) after the surgery. I decided to see if I was lucky, like the doctor said, and I tried to speak.

My mother tongue is Taiwanese, and only my wife and eldest son understood it. But when I spoke to them, they couldn't understand me. I wasn't lucky. I was like most people, unable to speak any language.

I remembered at that moment that a church member once said that determination is very important after a stroke or brain injury. So I was very determined to speak and kept trying, but no one could understand. So my wife suggested that I try to write what I wanted to say since I was trying so hard to speak. She gave me a piece of paper and a pen, and I told myself that this was the time to rely on my determination.

I tried very hard to write, using my left hand since my right hand was paralyzed. When I looked at my wife after I finished writing, I saw that there were tears in her eyes. I knew that something was wrong. Yet my wife told me, “You wrote very well.”

The part of my brain that controlled speech and language was damaged, so I couldn't speak or write, and my right side was completely paralyzed. But I could still understand what people said to me.

I was very happy despite not being able to speak or move the right side of

my body. I was happy because I wouldn't be able to carry out my responsibilities as a preacher anymore, and, therefore, the chance that I would lose my salvation was greatly diminished.

Don't get me wrong; I have always wanted to be a preacher—even as early as junior high. And receiving the Holy Spirit at that young age strengthened my hope of serving God in this capacity.

After I became a preacher, however, I started to worry that I would not be able to complete my work as a preacher. I heard stories of elders and preachers encountering many trials and temptations, and I learned that some were not able to continue being ministers. I worried that I would lose my salvation in the course of my work as a preacher because of trials or temptations.

Even so, I enjoyed being a preacher and thanked God for allowing my life to go so smoothly. But now, I believed that I had completed the work that had been entrusted to me as a preacher, and I felt a great freedom in this.



The “masterpiece” I produced after the May 22 surgery.

During my family's visit, I continued to pray in the spirit, which concerned the nurse. My wife reassured her that I was just praying.

Since I was in the ICU, my family couldn't stay long. My wife later told me that when they prayed with me before they left, I was able to say "hallelujah," but, no matter how much they tried to teach me and help me, I could not properly say "amen." After thirty minutes, they went home.

TALKING TO THE HEAVENLY FATHER

After my family left at 6 pm, I prayed in tongues and spoke to my heavenly Father in the spirit. Even though I couldn't speak, I could still say "hallelujah" and my tongue was unchanged when I prayed in the spirit.

I had never been so happy before in my life—I felt free, like I had been released, and also because I could now pray and speak to the heavenly Father.

I talked to the heavenly Father from 6 pm to 9 pm. I didn't see God or hear an actual voice, but I experienced everything in the spirit. I spoke to Him in tongues, and it felt like He was right next to me. I was so happy that I shed many tears while I was praying.

As I continued to pray and speak to God, I suddenly felt very small, like I had become a child. I said, "Abba, Father, can I sing a song for you?" He said, "Yes." I told Him, "Abba, I can't speak, but I can say 'hallelujah,' so I will sing hymn number 3 ["Hallelujah, Praise the True God"]. I can't say the other words, but at least I can say 'hallelujah.'"

So I sang this hymn to God and spoke to Him at the same time. I sang and shed tears because I was so moved by the experience, it was so beautiful. I did not ask God to heal me because I forgot at the time that I was partially paralyzed and could not speak. Furthermore, I felt that I was actually doing pretty well and was happy that I had completed my duty as a preacher.

I continued to pray and sing from 9 pm to 12 am. Then I told God, "Abba, I keep singing the same hymn, one that I learned as a child. Do you feel bored?" And He said, "Well, why don't you sing another one, then?" I thought of all the songs that I could remember learning in church and started singing all of them, whether in Mandarin, Taiwanese, English, or German. I sang until 3 am.

At 3 am the nurse came into my room again, and since I needed to ask her for something, I thought, "I've been singing for a long time, maybe I can speak now." So I tried to talk to her. She was shocked. I could tell from her expression that she was more surprised than I was that I could speak.

The nurse had been in and out of my room the entire night, during which I had been praying in tongues, singing, and crying. She knew that I had been unable to speak for several days already. And then suddenly, I was able to speak to her and she could understand me.

From that moment on, I was completely healed and was back to my normal self, just as I am now. When I realized that I had recovered, I was mischievous and said, "Abba, can I really speak now? How about I try memorizing Revelation 1:1?" I taught Greek at the theological seminary in Taiwan, so I tried reciting the verse in Greek. I could do it. And then I tried memorizing Genesis 1:1 in Hebrew, and I was able to do it as well. Then, I fell asleep.

BACK AT HOME

I stayed in the hospital for over a week after the surgery. During this time, I did not undergo any type of therapy because I was completely healed—I could walk, talk, and write. Due to an infection I acquired at the hospital, I was isolated in my own room and all visitors had to wear gowns, masks, and gloves. My wife and I got to spend a lot of time together and experience another honeymoon because of this.



My wife and I in the hospital after I was healed.

Ever since 3 am on May 23, 2009, after I prayed and sang hymns all night to the heavenly Father, I have been completely cured. When I was sick, I thought that I had completed my responsibilities, but after I was healed I restarted my work.

On Friday, May 29, a week after my last surgery, I had another CT scan on my brain. I was discharged two days later, on Sunday, May 31. Strangely, the doctor didn't come by to see me or speak to me. He had taken a lot of time to explain my condition after my initial surgery on May 15. However, on Sunday the nurse just told me that I could go home, so I left.

The first thing I did at home was to call my family in Taiwan and let them know that I was back home and completely healed. When I spoke to my mother and my brother, I could tell that something was wrong. They told me that my father had gone missing.

I prayed for my father and felt a lot of pain because he had been in good health and we didn't know what happened to him. Three days later, they found my father; he had been called back to the Lord. He was eighty years old. Thank God, my mother received a lot of comfort during this time through miracles and God's guidance.

My father's memorial service was scheduled to be held two weeks later. I told my wife that we had to take time off and go back to Taiwan. My wife didn't oppose me and just said, "Yes, we should all go back. But why don't we ask the doctor first?"

When the doctor spoke to us on the phone, he was quite stern. He said, "I understand how you feel. My father also passed away recently. But don't forget, if you get on the plane, you won't be able to get off. You may not be afraid to die,

but don't affect the other passengers. If you die during the flight, it causes trouble because the plane will have to make an emergency landing or fly for several hours with a dead body. No one will be able to save you on the plane."

After hearing this, I came to a realization and decided not to go. I sent my wife and my oldest son to attend the memorial service in Taiwan and represent me and my children.

COMPLETELY HEALED

On July 6, a few days after my wife and son returned from Taiwan, I went for my first checkup after my discharge from the hospital. They took a CT scan of my brain, and it showed no abnormalities or damage. The doctor told me that I was completely healed.

He gave me copies of all of the scans taken during my hospitalization, and, after seeing them, I understood why he hadn't come to see me when I was discharged on May 31. The scans taken on May 29 showed that my brain was still damaged, that the "blood cake" was still there. Yet, I appeared to be completely healed—I could talk, and my right side was no longer paralyzed. I was discharged from the hospital without a visit from the doctor because he wasn't able to explain what happened.

My wife had collected and organized a list of questions to ask the doctor at this checkup. There were three major categories of questions: 1) How did this illness occur? 2) How did you treat the illness? 3) How can we prevent this from happening again? There were many other questions under each category.

As we went through the list of questions, the doctor didn't really listen. Afterward, he told us three things:

1. Accept the illness as a fact. I told him that I enjoyed my illness because it gave me the opportunity to be close to my wife and my Creator. On earth, there is nothing better than this, so I was very thankful that I became ill.

2. We don't know the cause of your illness. The doctor told me that he saw many patients every year with similar cases of brain hemorrhage, typically caused by traumatic head injuries in car crashes. When he saw me initially in May, he had assumed that I had also sustained such an injury. However, I had recovered and was cleared to go home on May 19 when 25% of my brain was suddenly damaged, so it wasn't possible that I had sustained a traumatic head injury. The doctors did not know what had happened.

3. We didn't do anything to cure you. He said, "Your head gave us many headaches. Within seven days you had three operations. We removed part of your skull and looked at the brain in the last two operations. This was a last resort because there was nothing we could do. Your brain was still damaged when you were discharged, so we did nothing to cure you. From April to May, your condition deteriorated, but it was suddenly and mysteriously cured. We didn't do anything."

The doctor hadn't addressed our questions about prevention, and my wife was unwilling to leave without getting his advice. So she asked him what we should do to prevent this from happening again.

He became angry, stood up behind his desk, and said, "Mrs. Ko, I already told you. We admit that we don't know how the illness came about. Furthermore, we admit that we didn't do anything to heal your husband. How would I know what you should do to prevent it?"

I whispered to my wife, "Let's go home, he's angry now, we don't need to ask him anymore." I thought that if I were the doctor, I would have said, "You should get plenty of rest and drink plenty of water. Don't lift anything heavy but take some walks. Eat nutritious food, nothing salty or oily." But the doctor was very frank in his response.

The doctor asked if I needed to take medical leave, so my wife asked when I could start working again. He said I could

go back to work in four weeks, on August 9. My wife was surprised that it was so soon, thinking that I would need to take six months to recover. The doctor said, "He's only flying to Taiwan, that's no problem; he could even fly to the North or South Pole."

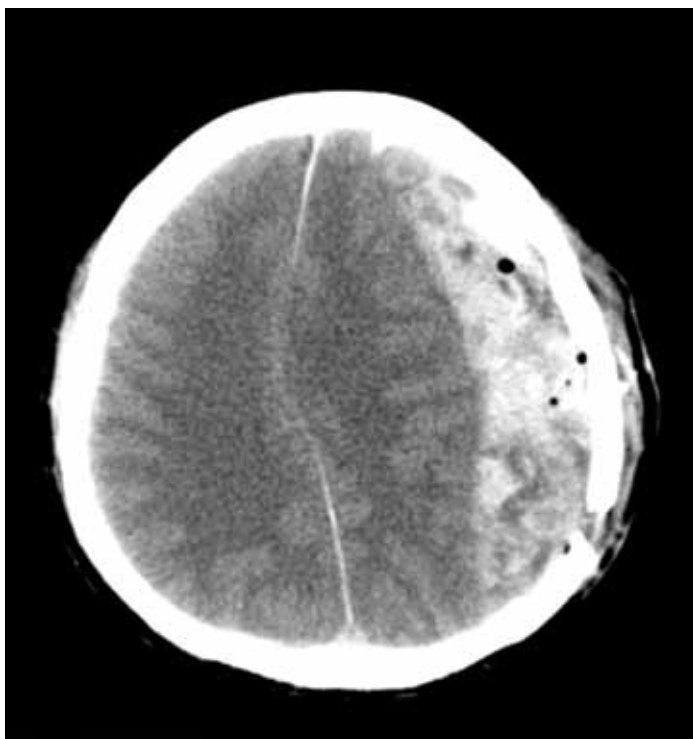
August 9 was the first day of the new semester of the theological school in Taiwan. My wife and brother didn't think I was ready to go back to work, but, since the doctor said I was fine, I went back to Taiwan in August. I resumed my full-time duties, and I've been working ever since.

I really thank God for all that has happened. But now I need the intercession of brothers and sisters even more. Why? Because the rough period has passed. In less developed areas, Satan will use less sophisticated methods to disturb and tempt people, such as demon possession.

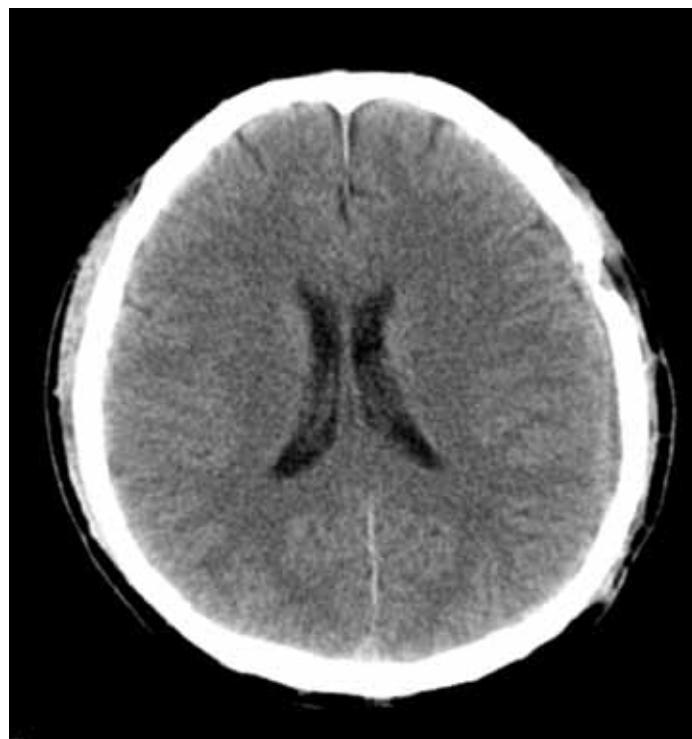
In the western world, Satan works on us from the inside, not the outside. He uses civilized methods and illnesses to control our thoughts and actions. Therefore, we need to pray even more and be watchful. The rough period has passed, but there will be more trials to come.

Ever since 3 am on May 23, 2009, after I prayed and sang hymns all night to the heavenly Father, I have been completely cured. When I was sick, I thought that I had completed my responsibilities, but, after I was healed, I restarted my work. I thank God for His grace, but I need continual prayer in my life of worship and service to God.

I thank God, and I thank all of you for your intercession and concern. ★



CT scan taken May 19. The "blood cake" is visible on the right.



CT scan taken July 6. No damage.

How to Maintain Youth Fellowships



Fellowship is an important element of one's spiritual growth and maturity. Just as the newly baptized members in Acts often gathered to study the word of the Lord, pray in the Spirit, and bear witness to the love of Jesus Christ, a youth fellowship provides opportunities for members to gather in His name and mutually edify and encourage one another in faith, strengthening each other in the Spirit and the Word.

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them. (Rom 12:4-6)

The youth play a critical role in the holy work of the church. Along with fostering spiritual growth, a youth fellowship helps to retain the youth membership and encourages participation in serving the local church.

The youth fellowship's foundation is the power of the Holy Spirit and of God's word, so its members should be rooted in a life of prayer and Bible study. In this way, a youth fellowship can edify and nurture its members as they strive toward completing a successful journey of faith.

OBJECTIVES OF A YOUTH FELLOWSHIP

1. Provide spiritual edification for youth fellowship members.
2. Foster spiritual growth.
3. Testify to the love and joy found in Jesus Christ.

To help fulfill these objectives, it is important for youth fellowships to implement events and programs in different areas. Below is an outline of the different areas a fellowship should cover, as well as suggested events.

BIBLE STUDY

Bible study is the most effective way to understand the Scriptures because group study and discussion can bring mutual understanding—members of the fellowship can encourage one another and equip one another to serve the Lord.

In determining the Bible study curriculum for the fellowship, the main considerations are the fellowship's objectives.

For example:

- If a youth fellowship seeks to improve its evangelical outreach, it can study the Acts of the Apostles.
- If a given fellowship has a small percentage participating in holy work, topics about serving the Lord may be useful in encouraging more participation.
- If there are members undergoing trials, character studies may encourage all the members of the fellowship.

In addition to Bible study, special topics or workshops may provide youth fellowship members with other perspectives on how the word can be applied to one's life. Ministers, church council members, or other experienced church members can share their insights on specific issues that youth fellowship members face in their spiritual, family, work, or school life.

Possible special topics:

- spiritual issues: developing a steadfast faith, overcoming trials and tribulations, finding one's calling
- school/career issues: choosing a major, graduate school, or job
- church issues: balancing service to God with school/career/family responsibilities, outreach to visitors and inactive members
- family issues: dealing with non-believing parents, quarrelling parents, difficult siblings, baptized parents who do not come to church
- life issues: dealing with serious illness, interpersonal relationships, dating/marriage, stress and time management

Periodic workshop sessions equip the members with the tools, skills, and direction to participate in serving the Lord. Possible workshop sessions include personal evangelism, survey of local church ministries, and holy work training.

FELLOWSHIP

In addition to Bible study, fellowship meetings provide a good avenue for spiritual cultivation. Examples of these meetings are as follows:

Hymnal/Praise Sessions

Hymn singing is a time to meditate upon God's love, grace, and mercy through hymns or praise songs. Fellowship leaders can choose hymns focusing on a particular theme or topic and share their reflections between hymns. Asking other members

How to Maintain Youth Fellowships

of the fellowship to share their favorite hymns or praise songs is also an effective way to foster spiritual growth in the group.

Personal Sharing

Time should be set aside during each fellowship meeting to give members the opportunity to share recent events in their lives and to make prayer requests. Personal sharing may also include testimonies of grace or blessings received from God.

Discussion

Discussion provides an excellent opportunity for fellowship members to share their views and experiences on a particular topic so that they will apply these concepts to their own lives.

An effective method for holding these sessions is to have the facilitator prepare questions beforehand and initiate discussion by sharing devotionals, personal testimonies, or reflections.

Mutual Caring

As the members of the fellowship are one body in Christ, it is critical that members continually care for one another's needs. An individual member's problem is also the problem of the fellowship.

Spiritual accountability allows each member in the fellowship to feel the love that compels them to care for and pray for each other. The following are some ways to demonstrate mutual caring:

- Forming care groups in which two to three active members focus their care on particular "lost sheep" or friends.
- Visiting all members. Visitation does not need to be limited to inactive members or friends; coordinators can arrange for local ministers and church council members to visit all youth fellowship members.
- Having meals with members.

Plan functions that help strengthen the bonds among members. Some activities that promote teamwork, friendship, and Christian bonding are camping, team sports, cooking, and games.

A youth fellowship should bear in mind that the activities and functions in which it participates should glorify the name of God and promote the development of a bond in Christ.

PRAYER

Prayer is crucial to the spiritual growth of the fellowship and each member. Just like the apostles, members of the fellowship must also rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance and power. The Holy Spirit can unify the fellowship so that all members will work together in one Spirit and one mind to edify one another, spread the gospel, and serve the Lord.

For the sake of personal spiritual growth, each member should pray on a daily basis. Fellowship members should pray together in the Spirit at every opportunity and should establish a prayer

time/location (or, if more convenient, at their own respective locations).

Prayer requests provide a focus for a prayer session. Such sharing further promotes mutual caring between the fellowship members.

EVANGELISM

The youth fellowship group should emphasize evangelical outreach as one of its primary objectives and work with the church to carry out this precious and important task. Jesus entrusted all believers with the task to preach the gospel to the end of the earth, and this commission should be reinforced in the fellowship.

Here are some methods of evangelism to consider:

- Personal evangelism. The most effective form of evangelism is for members to share their faith directly with people they encounter.
- Flyer distribution. Flyers can be distributed in residential or public areas, such as shopping centers and public transportation areas.
- Community service/outreach. Community service is a unique opportunity for fellowship members to work as a team and, at the same time, introduce the church to the people they meet. Some examples include participating in community clean-ups, soup kitchens, homeless ministry, and nursing home visits.
- Evangelical service. Members can invite friends to attend an informal or formal evangelical service organized by the fellowship. Regardless of format, its focus should be on biblical truth and life application.

ADMINISTRATION

Throughout the book of Acts, it is evident that the apostles constantly met to pray, sing hymns, and encourage one another. It is integral for a youth fellowship to meet regularly. The coordinators of the fellowship and the church council can work together to establish a consistent time and frequency for youth fellowship meetings. The locale of the fellowship can vary. Determine which locale is more conducive to carrying out the goals and objectives of the fellowship.

It is also important to maintain open lines of communication with the church council. In doing so, the council can support the fellowship members, who are usually between ages 18 to 40, as well as provide additional direction or insight. Continue to work with the church council to train members to serve the Lord.

A website or blog can be created to provide the most up-to-date information such as the fellowship schedule; member contact information; edifying testimonies, sharing, or devotionals; fellowship photographs; and links to the local church website.

Questions and Answers



Why does our church only allow members to participate in the Holy Communion?

In the Old Testament, Gentiles were forbidden to eat the Passover lamb (Ex 12:43). The Passover feast prefigures the New Testament Holy Communion (1 Cor 5:7, 8). Similarly, those who do not participate in the salvation of the Lord may not partake of the Holy Communion since they are foreigners to the kingdom of God.

The Lord's body and blood are holy and pure; those whose sins have not been cleansed through baptism are not worthy to partake of the Holy Communion (see 1 Cor 11:27-29). And only those who have received the correct baptism for the remission of sins may partake of the Holy Communion.

The Holy Communion is a fellowship (Koinônia) among the believers within the church. Unbelievers or those who do not share the same faith with us are not part of the communion in the true church. So they should not partake of the Holy Communion.

Other churches believe that the bread and wine they use in Holy Communion are physically transformed into the physical flesh and blood of Jesus. How do we explain our view of the transformation of the bread and grape juice?

The bread and grape juice are the body and blood of the Lord after giving thanks. By eating and drinking the communion, we may receive the spiritual effects promised by God's word. But the bread and juice have not changed materially.

The manna that the Israelites ate in the wilderness prefigures the true bread from heaven—the flesh of the Lord Jesus (Jn 6:31-33, 49-51). According to Paul, the Israelites ate “spiritual food” and drank “spiritual drink” (1 Cor 10:3, 4). The prefiguration is applied in spiritual terms. Therefore during Holy Communion, we partake of the spiritual body and spiritual blood of the Lord.

The Lord Jesus said, “The Spirit gives life, flesh counts for nothing” (Jn 6:63). Here He elaborated on the previous passage (Jn 6:32-57), which His followers found difficult to accept (Jn 6:60). In other words, the flesh and blood Jesus was referring to was flesh and blood in the spiritual sense, rather than the material sense.

Facts, Stats and **Syntax**



Did You Know?

The Day of Pentecost was also known as the “Feast of Weeks,” “First Fruits of the Wheat Harvest,” (Ex 23:16, 34:22), and the “Day of the First Fruits” (Num 28:26). It takes place fifty days after the Passover. It is a celebration in which the Israelites offer the first fruits of their harvest to God as a thanksgiving and expect Him to bless the rest of the harvest period (Lev 23:15-19; Num 28:26-29). The Holy Spirit was poured out upon the believers for the first time on the Day of Pentecost, as recorded in Acts chapter 2.

Polls and Statistics

According to a survey asking respondents, “Is religion an important part of your daily life?”

Top 11 Most Religious Countries

Country	% Yes
Egypt	100
Bangladesh	99
Sri Lanka	99
Indonesia	98
Congo (Kinshasa)	98
Sierra Leone	98
Malawi	98
Senegal	98
Djibouti	98
Morocco	98
United Arab Emirates	98

Top 11 Least Religious Countries

Country	%Yes
Estonia	14
Sweden	17
Denmark	18
Norway	20
Czech Republic	21
Azerbaijan	21
Hong Kong	22
Japan	25
France	25
Mongolia	27
Belarus	27

From: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/114211/Alabamians-Iranians-Common.aspx>

Word Study

“Christ,” translated from the Greek word *Christos*, which is “Messiah” in Hebrew, means the “Anointed One.” Jesus, the long-expected “King of the Jews,” was sometimes called “Christ” or “the Christ,” which was a title, a recognition that He was the Savior.

The Miracles of Jesus

The Gospels contain many accounts of Jesus performing miracles. Whether healing the sick, casting out demons, or feeding five thousand with two fish and five loaves, Jesus helped others by defying the laws of nature. Yet there is more to the miracles than the divine power of Jesus.

The followers of Jesus who experienced miracles believed in Him, and they were blessed to receive His grace. Faith and belief are essential for us today, yet are not sufficient. Experiencing Jesus' work in our life solidifies our faith and strengthens its foundation—afterward, we have a better understanding of our heavenly Father and ourselves. And this understanding lifts us to new levels of spiritual maturity.

The theme articles study some of Jesus' miracles and explore the relationship between miracles, faith, and growth. As we read them we can reflect on our own experiences with Jesus and how we have grown. While we continue to refine our lives, let us always remember the extraordinary grace we have received and strengthen our faith.



From Seeing to Believing

Learning from the Sign Jesus Did Before Thomas

Stephen Ku—Pacifica, California, USA

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (Jn 20:26-29)

"Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, I will not believe" (Jn 20:25).

Thomas was certainly not afraid to speak his mind, even when he was the lone minority.

The other ten disciples had just seen their teacher and risen Lord, who had died a gruesome death and came into their midst through closed doors. He showed them His pierced hands and side and breathed on them, giving them the promise of the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:19-23).

The greatest miracle had happened before their eyes, turning their fear to joy. And seeing their resurrected Lord revived their lost hope in Him.

Thomas had missed this historic moment. They told him in excitement, "We have seen the Lord!" But the unanimous witness of his peers did not persuade him one bit. In his heart, Jesus was dead. As far as he was concerned, all that he had once hoped for in Jesus was now over. Nothing could arouse his faith anymore.

Perhaps this was what went through his mind:

You saw the Lord?

No. You were seeing things because you were so desperate to find something to calm your fears.

You saw Jesus' hands and side?

Did you actually touch them to see if they were real?

No. You have all been tricked by your own imagination.

For Thomas, the only way to prove himself wrong was for him not only to see the nail prints on Jesus' hands but also to put his finger into the print and his hand into His side. Thomas was sure that his demand was an impossible one. Whatever the other disciples saw simply was not true. End of discussion.

SEEING INSPIRES FAITH

"My Lord and my God!"

Now imagine the Thomas who professed these words of utter surrender. What wrought the total change of attitude in him was a sign—a sign that Jesus did specifically for him. Jesus came through closed doors, appeared before Thomas' eyes, spoke with him, and offered to let him verify that He was real.

In the Gospel according to John, signs play a crucial role in Jesus' works. Before the multitudes and the disciples, Jesus did many signs (Jn 7:31, 12:37, 20:30).

Right after the account of Jesus' appearance to Thomas, the Scripture tells us, "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book" (Jn 20:30).

This indicates that what Jesus did in the foregoing account was a sign.

A sign, by definition, is a distinguishing mark that points to something beyond itself. By means of some extraordinary occurrence, signs visibly reveal Jesus' identity as the Christ, the Son of God.

The ultimate purpose of Jesus' signs, according to John, is so that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and "that believing [we] may have eternal life in His name" (Jn 20:31). The signs that Jesus performed were not only a show of divine power, but served to lead the people to believe that He is the Savior of the world, the true answer to our problems.

By feeding the multitude with only five loaves and two fish, Jesus revealed that



He is the bread of life from heaven. By healing the man blind from birth, Jesus showed that He is the light of the world. By raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus demonstrated that He is the resurrection and the life.

Therefore, miraculous signs play a necessary part in the proclamation of the gospel. Even today, God continues to bear witness to us with signs, wonders, and miracles (Heb 2:4). Through these acts of God, we may come to have saving faith in the Lord Jesus.

MY LORD AND MY GOD

When we experience a miracle, especially when God does it for us personally, we find ourselves in the presence of the almighty yet loving God. We stand in awe, humbled and moved, at a loss for words.

This was what happened to Thomas. No more verbose claims. Only a cry of faith: "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus knew what Thomas needed, and so He acted to meet that need. In fact, He also has a lesson to teach us, the readers. He could have waited until all eleven of the disciples were together, but He chose to appear to them when Thomas was absent.

He heard Thomas' words to the other disciples. Eight days later, while Thomas was with the rest, Jesus appeared again, especially for him. What Jesus asked Thomas to do was exactly according to the impossible terms Thomas had laid down—to put his finger into His hands and to put his hand into His side.

Thomas did not even have to touch Jesus' hands and side before He professed His faith in the risen Christ. Jesus had shown him beyond a doubt that He was alive. Even more importantly, Jesus cared enough to manifest Himself again solely for him.

Jesus never performed a sign just to satisfy an unbeliever's demand (Mt 12:38, 39; Jn 2:18-22), and He was in no way obligated to convince Thomas of His

Whether we are able to believe and trust in our Lord matters a great deal to Him. How many times has God gone out of His way to seek us when we were lost? Even when we have given up on Him, He never gives up on us.

resurrection. But Jesus did not give up on Thomas. He was aware of Thomas' character—that he would not buy into anything easily, especially something of such magnitude.

He also knows about the Thomas within each of us. The Thomas who had once left everything to follow the Lord and had now forsaken his faith. Jesus, out of His love for Thomas, made a point to restore his lost faith.

Whether we are able to believe and trust in our Lord matters a great deal to Him. How many times has God gone out of His way to seek us when we were lost? Even when we have given up on Him, He never gives up on us. In some miraculous way, He touches our lives and shows us that He still cares. At that moment, we are caught in wonder and a sense of worthlessness.

All we can say in our stupor is "My Lord and my God!" God is no longer the God of other Christians or of our family members. He becomes our very own. This personal encounter with the Lord is what is most precious about miracles. It is not the vision, the healing, or the deliverance from danger. But it is coming face to face with our Lord and our God through the power and kindness He has shown us.

Such personal encounters with God tend to stay with us for the rest of our lives. Even in moments of doubt, we can recall them and renew our faith again.

SEEING AND BELIEVING

Seeing is believing, as the saying goes. This world has taught us to only believe something when we have proof in our hands. Who would put money down for a house without any signed legal documents? Which top university would

grant you admissions simply because you claim to qualify?

We have all learned to be skeptical until we see proof. After all, how can we know what is true or false without some clear evidence?

God knows that in a world of mistrust, we are no longer able to believe in the truth without any convincing proof (Jn 4:48). For this reason, Jesus not only taught the people the truth about God and His salvation, He also worked miracles, wonders, and signs among the people (Acts 2:22).

In doing so, He manifested His glory, demonstrating that the Father was at work in Him and that He was indeed one with the Father (Jn 2:11, 10:37, 38). Thus, Jesus' signs were an integral part of His ministry.

If signs were so important, was it wrong for Thomas to ask for a sign to show that Jesus had indeed resurrected? And for that matter, is it really wrong for us to ask to see before we believe?

Jesus said to Thomas, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (Jn 20:29). It appears as if Jesus expects us to believe in Him without any visible proof. It also seems that Jesus was dismissing the importance of signs and miracles. But this is not so.

Bear in mind that Jesus had already appeared to the other ten disciples. He showed them His hands and His side. Even when Jesus appeared especially to Thomas eight days later, the other disciples were also present to witness this sign. Thomas was not the only disciple who believed only upon seeing. So the problem does not lie in seeing miracles.

In fact, the Bible tells us that after Jesus had risen from the dead, He presented Himself alive to the apostles “by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:2, 3). If the Lord expects faith without any proof or sight, He would not have performed so many signs and produced all the infallible proofs before His disciples.

What, then, was wrong with Thomas’ attitude? Let us think about his ultimatum again: “Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into

While Jesus has allowed us to see His glory through signs, miracles, and wonders, He does not want us to make them a condition for faith. Seeing may lead to faith, but faith should not depend on seeing.

His side, I will not believe.” He was not seeking a sign as much as to assert his staunch unbelief.

Using the strongest form of negation,¹ Thomas insisted that He would not believe except under the conditions he set forth. Elsewhere in the NKJV, the double negative is usually translated as “by no means” or “never.” In other words, Thomas was saying, “Unless I can authenticate things my way, I will never believe!” Perhaps the expression “doubting Thomas” is not nearly as accurate as “unbelieving Thomas.”

Jesus’ final command to Thomas was this: “Do not be unbelieving, but believing” (Jn 20:29). Jesus was not only instructing him to believe for the moment that Jesus was indeed alive. Thomas had fallen into a state of unbelief, and he

chose to remain so unless he was proven wrong.

The adjective “unbelieving” is also translated as “faithless” (cf. Mt 17:17). Elsewhere in the Bible, this word applies only to unbelievers. This was the condition Thomas had put himself in—he had become an unbeliever. Jesus, out of His compassion, lifted Thomas out of his unbelief.

By placing terms and conditions on faith, Thomas had placed a limit on God. He would only believe that Jesus had resurrected if those terms and conditions were met. This was an indication of his state of unbelief.

FAITH BEYOND SEEING

According to the Lord Jesus, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. These are people who trust in the Lord without placing any conditions on God. That includes us, the readers, who put our faith in the risen Christ without having seen Him with our eyes. As Jesus’ disciples, we should no longer resort to the mentality of “seeing is believing.”

While Jesus has allowed us to see His glory through signs, miracles, and wonders, He does not want us to make them a condition for faith. Seeing may lead to faith, but faith should not depend on seeing.

Our Lord wants us to go on from seeing to believing—to continue believing even in the absence of miracles. Can you picture a relationship in which one has to keep producing proofs to earn the other’s trust? This is surely not the kind of relationship we want to have with our Lord.

God may do wonders in our lives and before our eyes, but only according to His sovereign will and according to His timetable, not ours. Unlike scientific experiments, miracles are not for us to use at our disposal to verify God’s words. Instead, they are out of God’s mercy toward us, and we are humbled at the sight of God’s glory.

Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 5:7, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” Our journey to our eternal home does not depend on sight. Signs and miracles would benefit us only if we come to Christ as a result and believe in Him as our Lord and our God. Once we have established this personal and trusting relationship with God, it is faith that will take us to the end.

Through His miraculous appearance, Jesus became to Thomas his Lord and his God. Thomas had now grown beyond sight and was no longer dependent on sight. We likewise have claimed Jesus as “my Lord and my God.” Let us not become hardened in our hearts but walk daily by faith until the day we see Him as He is. ★

1. The double negative οὐ μή is the most decisive way of negating something in the future.



Cleansing the Ten Lepers

Jason Hsu—Baldwin Park, California, USA

The Lord's grace and compassion is clearly evident in His healing ministry. Among the many miracles Jesus performed, His healings of lepers depict some of the most memorable highlights of His earthly ministry (Lk 5:12-14, 17:11-19).

In Jesus' healing of the ten lepers, the main lesson is thankfulness, or the lack thereof. Thankfulness, one of the most beautiful of human expressions when it comes from deep within the heart, is a gift given to us by God. We should not live our lives without cultivating our thankfulness.

Through study of this event, we can meditate on how God's grace in our life should instill us with a thankful heart.

THE CURSE OF LEPROSY

Many things in life can make a person unattractive. An offensive personality can

make even the most physically beautiful person ugly (Mt 23:27).

We may be scarred or maimed through misfortune or accident, but we often hide even deeper wounds within.

In Jesus' day, lepers had a visible skin condition that made them unsightly. But the inner wounds inflicted by the disease were perhaps the most difficult to endure. Leprosy was feared as a punishment from God (Num 12:10; 2 Kgs 5:27). It humbled even kings and generals throughout history (2 Chr 26:19, 20; 2 Kgs 5:1).

In ancient Israel, a leper's life was marked by segregation and ceremonial uncleanness. Generally isolated from others, the leper was put outside the camp:

He shall be unclean. All the days he has [leprosy] he shall be unclean. He is unclean,

and he shall dwell alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp. (Lev 13:46)

The lepers that Jesus met would likely have suffered daily from humiliation, despair, and loneliness. After a long time living on the fringe of society, it would be natural for lepers to question the value of their existence.

In addition to being a sign of uncleanness (Lev 13:45), the Bible speaks of the leper as “one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother’s womb!” (Num 12:12; cf. Job 18:13). Leprosy, then, is a picture of human tragedy and affliction. Without a cure, lepers became social outcasts and the living dead.

THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD’S GRACE

Tragedy and Grace

In life, we are beset with things beyond our control. Human life often becomes human tragedy. Job’s story illustrates how tragic events can come upon us suddenly and without apparent reason (Job 1:12-2:10).

Imagine the tragedy in our life if we were suddenly afflicted with an incurable disease. How would we live out our days? With joy? Thankfulness? Bitterness? Anger?

Jesus’ healing ministry, however, has an important message: no matter how tragic our day-to-day life may appear, God’s grace is sufficient for those who put their trust in Him.

In the story of Elijah and the widow from Zarephath, a widow and her son were about to eat their last meal and die. In this sad picture of human life, God’s love and grace appeared. The widow’s bin of flour and jar of oil lasted until the Lord sent rain upon the earth (1 Kgs 17:8-16). From this simple story we gather an important truth: God’s grace often abounds where human tragedy exists.

God never miscalculates. He knows where our life begins and ends. He

As Christians, we understand that all human needs can find fulfillment in God, but we often fail to acknowledge that truth practically. Precious few take the time to remember God’s abundant grace and thank Him for it. If we do not realize God’s grace, we will not see its fulfillment in our lives.

revealed to the apostle Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you” (2 Cor 12:9), and so it is for us.

Luke 17:11-19 illustrates God’s grace to those in dire need of it. Ten lepers—a distilled picture of the tragedy that so often besets human life—were in great need of a savior. Are we any different? When we realize how great our need truly is, we all cry for a savior.

A Position of Great Need

[As Jesus] entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. (Lk 17:12)

The ten lepers stood “afar off.” This is a position of great need. And this is where so many of us find ourselves in relation to God: “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13).

Like the ten lepers, we are in need of grace, and yet it seems far off from us. We may become so alienated from our heavenly Father that we lose our way, and, as if wasting our life in a far country, we stand a great way off from God (Lk 15:13, 20). Or, perhaps, like the tax collector in Jesus’ parable, we are fully aware of our sinful condition and therefore plead for His mercy from a distance (Lk 18:13).

Although the weight of sin brings great need and human life is beset with hardship, toil, and suffering, we must acknowledge that our lives are often deeply touched by grace and compassion, through the love of God. Through grace, we find healing and sufficiency to help us overcome our most difficult times.

A leper once came to Jesus to ask for healing. The leper said, “Lord, if You are

willing, You can make me clean.” Jesus stretched out His hand, touched the leper, and said, “I am willing, be cleansed” (Lk 5:12, 13). This outstretched arm, this gentle hand, that lifts a person out of the darkness and into the light, characterizes the grace of God in our darkest times of need.

The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ

And they lifted up their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” So when He saw them, He said to them, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. (Lk 17:13, 14)

We all have many needs. For most of us, basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing can always be met. Yet, there are many needs, such as air, water, sunshine, and light that are fulfilled and often taken for granted.

Additionally, we may have unmet needs that we are not even consciously aware of. How many people need God but are unaware of their need? The need for love, companionship, or mercy may be unfulfilled in our lives, but we may not even be aware we are missing these things.

So many needs go unmet, and so many things in life are denied us. How we face our needs, how we handle our unfulfilled needs, and how we view the needs that have been met have a dramatic impact on whether we live a thankful or unthankful life.

When we consider all that we have received from God, His grace in our lives is beyond comprehension. As Christians, we understand that all human needs can

find fulfillment in God, but we often fail to acknowledge that truth practically. Precious few take the time to remember God's abundant grace and thank Him for it. If we do not realize God's grace, we will not see its fulfillment in our lives.

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned... (Lk 17:15)

If our eyes have been enlightened to the depth of God's grace in our lives, we will be thankful. The bitterness of our sacrifices and the tribulations we've endured are then put into proper perspective.

What we've given to God in terms of our time, resources, and heart will no longer become unreciprocated favors; rather, they will be insignificant contributions that can never repay the debt of love we owe. The tribulations we've endured will be less about God's injustice and more about His good plan for us.

We will realize that what we thought "should be" maybe was not meant to be, and what "should not have been" was instead what "should be" (cf. Gen 50:19, 20). And we will be thankful for all we have received.

Sometimes, our eyes are opened to the truth of life only through great tribulation. Job realized this after his own trials. As he learned to trust God, even in his desperate circumstances, he saw that God's grace was sufficient for him. In the end, Job came to peace with all he had undergone. He said:

"You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?'

Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,

Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.

Listen, please, and let me speak;

You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.'

"I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear,

But now my eye sees You.

*Therefore I abhor myself,
And repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:3-6)*

FORGETTING THE GRACE OF GOD

Ten lepers had a great need, and ten lepers received grace to meet that need. But only one out of the ten came back to give thanks:

And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. (Lk 17:15, 16)

Jesus was disappointed to the point that He seemed shocked. Only one came back?

So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" (Lk 17:17, 18)

Jesus' reaction teaches us that God wants those who receive His grace to know how to give thanks. It's easy to forget the grace we have received. It's easy to explain away all that we have received in life as "how it should be" or a matter of coincidence.

Throughout the history of God's people we discover that they repeatedly forgot what God had done for them, and they forgot to have a thankful heart for the grace they had received.

During the time of the judges, God's people forgot that He had delivered them from slavery in Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey (Deut 4:34, 11:2, 3, 26:8, 9). After Joshua's generation passed away, an entire generation arose that did not know the Lord or the work He had done for His people (Judg 2:10, 12).

God's people forgot His grace, and His hand became heavy upon them;



generation after generation, God's people encountered cycle after cycle of affliction (Judg 2:15).

The farther we drift away from a heart of thanksgiving, the less of God's grace we experience and see. We may suddenly realize one day how far away our life has drifted from His grace. If, by the grace of God, we come to our senses that day, we must return to Him.

We often look every place but within to find out what is wrong with the world. Yet, because we fail to see ourselves clearly, we cannot understand what is truly lacking.

If we wonder why we cannot perceive God's grace in our lives while simultaneously failing to possess a thankful heart within ourselves, we're like broken vessels that cannot perceive why they are never filled. If we want to be filled, we must reflect on and remember God's grace with thanksgiving.

LEARNING FROM A THANKFUL HEART

Human weakness is to forget and take for granted what we have received from others. Human weakness is to look at what we are missing rather than what we have received.

A person who does not have a thankful heart will not know how to truly worship the Lord, because a thankful heart is at the center of worship. We see this from the one leper who returned and fell face down at the Lord's feet.

Having a thankful heart not only affects how we give thanks for what we have already received, but also how we give

of ourselves for the sake of others. The Lord Jesus gave much during His ministry on earth. In the end, He gave everything that He had—His life and His all—for us, without price. This is a life full of grace.

But how much have we given? If we are honest with ourselves, we would have to admit that our love toward both God and man has failed in one way or another, to a greater or lesser extent.

Human love has limitations. We can only do as much as we know, with as much power as we have, with as much grace as we have received.

How deeply have we received the grace of God in our lives? On the surface, God's grace was the same for all ten lepers, for all ten were healed. On a deeper level, the one Samaritan leper who came back and glorified God received so much more.

What was the difference? A thankful heart. With a thankful heart, the grace of God is so much sweeter, and we experience it much more deeply.

Therefore, let us learn from Jesus' cleansing of the ten lepers, to possess a thankful heart—one that knows how to fully receive the grace of God, so that it can offer from its depths to others and to God. This is the example that our Lord Jesus Christ left for us in His ministry. May He grant us the strength to follow in His footsteps.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Col 3:17) ★

Let us learn from Jesus' cleansing of the ten lepers, to possess a thankful heart—one that knows how to fully receive the grace of God, so that it can offer from its depths to others and to God.



Praying for Healing

Vincent Yeung—Cambridge, UK

People often use the expression “We need a miracle.” To them, a miracle is something that has a minimal chance of occurring. When someone survives a car crash or when there are no fatalities in a disaster, people would say that it was a miracle.

The word is now devoid of its religious meaning, having nothing to do with God anymore. To most people, life is just a random process and miracles part of that description. Even for Christians, miracles are things of the distant past—plentiful in Jesus’ time and in the apostolic church but almost non-existent today, especially in the western world.

Miracles are not normally in the forefront of our minds. They appear only when something is getting out of hand and we have no choice but to turn to God for help. It’s no wonder that we see fewer

and fewer miracles today. Is God less powerful today than in the past? Is God more accessible in Africa, where miracles seem to be commonplace?

Many members who need our intercession are suffering from cancer or other chronic or fatal illnesses. When we pray for them, do we do so out of habit? Are we expecting a miracle?

We need to reconnect with God and rediscover the meaning of miracles and our relationship with and trust in Him.

PRAYER AND COMPASSION COMES FIRST

When we are in good health, it is difficult to fathom the suffering of those who are severely hindered by their illnesses. The unburdened and well off thank God for their many blessings, taking good health for granted, assuming that those who are

suffering from serious illnesses are also able to have the same healthy, spiritual stamina.

But being struck with an illness or afflicted with a long-term chronic condition does create a hindrance and may prevent people from having the right mindset to pray to God. Anger and frustration with their situation creep in, pain makes it difficult to concentrate, and fatigue makes long prayers impossible.

It is helpful to shower the sick with sympathy and physical support, but, more importantly, we need to help bring them to God.

There are a number of examples in the Bible where the sick were brought to Jesus, such as the blind man at Bethsaida (Mk 8:22) and the deaf man at the border of the Decapolis (Mk 7:32).

The ultimate example of support that won the heart of Jesus was the case of a paralytic, recorded in Mark chapter 2. Not only did people carry him to Jesus, they had to lower the paralytic, on his bed, from the roof.

This troublesome and arduous effort would have been too much for unconcerned people to perform. However, the formidable faith of these men in bringing the paralytic to Jesus did not go unnoticed (Mk 2:5). Seeing their faith, Jesus was moved to heal the paralytic (Mk 2:11, 12).

We should not underestimate the power of intercession, even if we are not the person in suffering or part of their close circle of family and friends. Our love and empathy towards the sick and our unmovable trust in Jesus manifested as selfless sacrifices will touch His heart.

Compassion and faithful action are particularly important when the sick are incapable of praying for themselves, whether they are children, in a coma, depressed, or debilitated by their illnesses. However, the intercession of others is not enough. The faith of those who are sick and their family are also important in bringing about a miracle.

A HEALTHY STATE OF MIND Faith Is Needed for a Miracle to Happen

As the saying goes, you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. We can bring someone to church and pray with and for him, but ultimately he needs to believe and have trust in Jesus.

When the church intercedes for someone who is sick and he does not improve, it appears as if Jesus failed to listen to our prayers. In such cases, we should ask ourselves: Is it God's will that this person should not recover? Are we praying hard enough? Have we sinned against God, thereby making our prayer ineffective?

If these questions are not the problem, we have to consider the faith of the one we are praying for. Even Jesus could not

God's power is limitless, but His work is constrained and curtailed by man's faithlessness. Therefore, Jesus exhorted, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."

help when people refused to believe in Him. When He went back to His hometown, people despised Him because they knew His family and His upbringing. They had heard of His mighty power and acknowledged His wisdom, yet they refused to accept and believe (Mk 6:1-6).

The Gospel according to Mark highlights an important fact—because of their unbelief, Jesus “could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them” (Mk 6:5).

God's power is limitless, but His work is constrained and curtailed by man's faithlessness. Therefore, Jesus exhorted, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes” (Mk 9:23). It is up to us, not God, to make miracles happen.

Faith and Unbelief Coexist

The disciples were often noted to be of “little faith” (Mt 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8; Lk 12:28). It is ironic that Jesus' followers were so close to Him, praying with Him and learning from Him, yet so far away from Him in faith.

Our faith and trust in Jesus are no different; they peak and ebb with the events in our life. When we are close to God, such as when we attend spiritual convocation and theological training, we feel energized and empowered by God. When we are knocked off our course by unforeseen events, when we or our loved one are afflicted with illness, doubt creeps in and our faith falters.

Knowing our limitations as mere mortals, it is not shameful to tell others that we are weak and need help. A father once asked Jesus for help because his son

had a mute spirit in him (Mk 9:17). Jesus exhorted the father to believe in God, yet the father cried out, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mk 9:24).

The antithesis between belief and unbelief is astounding. The two co-exist and intertwine within our hearts. The struggle between faith and reason, trust and distrust, patience and frustration, plays out within our heart. We constantly wonder, God is able but is He willing?

We should not fall into the trap of thinking that a good Christian is a perfect Christian. There is no doubt that “whatever is not from faith is sin” (Rom 14:23). However, we are deluding ourselves if we say that we have absolute faith and have no sin (1 Jn 1:8).

Weaknesses and sin are a part of life. While we are on earth, we will still be prone to falling short of God's glory. But that does not mean we cannot come before God to ask for forgiveness and help.

Jesus did not reject the father or rebuke him because of his unbelief. Instead, He showed mercy by casting out the spirit from the boy.

Jesus can feel and understand our infirmities and hopelessness, and we are able to obtain mercy and find grace in our time of need (Heb 4:15, 16). All we need to do is to pick up whatever little and feeble faith we have and plead to Him for help: “Lord, help my unbelief!”

Trust in God During Healing

We often ask ourselves whether we should we take medicine or go to the doctor when we are not well. Often, the prevailing mentality is, “Surely the faithful seek God's help rather than solve their problem using their own means.”

The tension between seeking God's healing alone and using medicine to relieve suffering was already being voiced 180 years before Jesus' time: Ben Sirach, a Jewish scholar and scribe, suggested that doctors' skills and remedies came from God.

It is true that God has granted humans wisdom, which has resulted in innovation and advancement. Seeking medical help is not a sign of faithlessness, but we should be aware of its limitations. Medicine and doctors can do a lot of good, but the power of healing ultimately lies with God. In fact, praying for God's help and receiving medical treatment go hand in hand.

Many miracles in the Bible happened instantaneously. Jesus uttered a word and immediately the paralytic arose (Mk 2:12), the leprosy left the leper (Mk 1:42), and the deaf-mute's ears opened and his tongue loosed (Mk 7:35). However, sometimes healing was a process rather than an event.

There was an exceptional example in Mark where healing took place gradually. Jesus spat on a blind man's eyes and put His hands on him. The blind man could see again but not clearly. Jesus put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up, and his sight was restored (Mk 8:23-25).

We may wonder at the purpose of this gradual healing, as Jesus could have healed the man instantly without touching him. The process of gradual improvement to complete recovery can be a tumultuous path for the sick; any setback in their treatment is a blow to their morale and chips away their trust in God.

Yet, God wants us to have total trust in Him. The suffering we experience serves as a reminder of our frailty and dependence on God. Job described his suffering as a refinement process—his faith would be like pure gold after the dross and impurities have been removed by the fire of tribulation.

We should not underestimate God's power in our healing, even if we are receiving medical treatment and praying for God's healing simultaneously. We should not neglect God's guiding hand and how He navigates our path to recovery. Though this path may be long and filled with small victories instead of

instant health, we cannot waver in our faith and trust in His power.

It is ultimately God who decides whether or not we will respond to treatment. We should be thankful for His providential care, understanding that God's healing is not necessarily always a dramatic event. Every little grace and care along our path to recovery should be seen as God's healing hand.

FAITH AND MIRACLES

From a secular perspective, a miracle is an event that does not follow the laws of nature. From a biblical perspective, a miracle (σημείον), which is also translated as "sign," is associated with healing (Act 4:22), wonders, and power (2 Cor 12:12).

In Jesus' ministry, preaching the kingdom of God and healing all kinds of sickness are indissolubly linked (Mt 4:23, 9:35). Sin and death reigned in the world because of Adam (Rom 5:12; cf. Gen 3:22), but through faith many were delivered spiritually and physically (Mk 2:5; Mt 9:22). Through the power of Jesus' name, many were healed (Acts 4:10), demonstrating God working among His chosen people (Acts 15:12).

Miracles still happen in our church today: a sister in Africa was pronounced dead but was brought back to life by prayer; a demon-possessed woman was restored after intercession and denouncing idol worship; a brother who was afflicted with a terminal brain tumor returned home to die after baptism, but God empowered him to live and bear witness to his family and local villagers. This brother's unmovable faith and inner peace enabled him to bring many to believe.

There are clouds of witnesses to God's guiding hand during illnesses and rehabilitations, which are too numerous to recount here.

God works in mysterious ways in our life, so we do not know the timing of His healing or the path that it will take. Yet, we should bear in mind that God can

only work in us and in those we pray for according to the depth and breath of our trust in Him.

Death and illness are inevitable (Heb 9:27), but, as long as Jesus reigns in our heart, we are empowered to overcome the anxiety and sorrow death causes in us. On one level, miracles restore health, but, on a higher level, they denote the comfort, peace, and tranquility that belief and trust in God bring.

Miracles come only with an unmovable trust in God, support from friends and family, and two well-worn knees.★



Important Steps in Building My Marriage

Patricia Chen—Irvine, California, USA

My husband and I just celebrated our sixteenth wedding anniversary. For those who are just thinking about getting married, that is a huge milestone. Compared with couples of my parents' generation, we still have a ways to go before we celebrate our fiftieth.

Even though sixteen years sounds like a long time, it doesn't seem that long ago when my husband and I were engaged. We were engaged in January and married in July of the same year. The six months of engagement were very important because that was a precious time of not just planning for the day of the wedding but also preparing ourselves to spend the rest of our lives with one another.

Looking back at my personal journey, I notice that there were significant steps

that we took both during engagement and marriage that were meaningful and helpful in building our marriage. These steps came about from understanding what marriage really involves.

Yet, knowing important principles and teachings in the Bible related to marriage didn't automatically translate into us becoming the perfect husband and wife. There were many lessons we had to learn—and are still learning—in reality.

A LIFELONG COMMITMENT

"So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Mt 19:6)

God planned from the beginning that marriage should last a lifetime. If a lifelong commitment is not the foundation on which we build our marriage, then it won't be long until cracks appear in our relationship. Marriage needs to be based on a covenant of commitment and love.

After my husband and I were introduced, even before we got engaged, we talked about this commitment. We both understood that married couples must confront adversity and crises that can knock both husband and wife off their feet. It could be an illness, financial trouble, an accident, or a failure that leads to losing respect for one another. How would we handle such problems?

We decided that we had to enter marriage with the conviction that we would never consider, even for a moment, divorce or do anything that would jeopardize our hope of entering heaven. We knew that marriage was a commitment that called us to continually put the other's needs above our own, to forgive the other's mistakes, and to always pray for God's strength to go through tough times together.

In a marriage, we all need to have this determination. Maintaining the relationship is not based on whether the wife or the husband remains a certain way or looks a certain way. It is not conditional on the couple's joy or sex life. A Christian marriage is founded on commitment to one another.

There are times when a husband and wife don't enjoy each other. Maybe your spouse has let you down, or you get into a fight and the relationship stalls.

What is important, however, is whether or not you still accept your spouse despite his or her flaws. These daily or weekly irritants, if not dealt with, can bring tremendous damage to the marriage.

Remember, even minor irritations often cause pain in a marriage. Therefore, we should humbly ask God to help us, asking the Holy Spirit to anoint us with grace and wisdom. If we stay committed to God's

teaching, our marriage will hold steady through all circumstances. Commitment becomes more powerful than our circumstances or moods.

This is why Jesus Christ has to be part of the marriage. God has to be the foundation, for the unshakable truth of God's word holds a marriage together. Even though we may face hardships or heavy pressures in life, the marriage will grow stronger because committing to one another and to God nurtures lasting love.

Just as God has made an unconditional covenant with us, He calls us to make such a commitment in our marriage:

*"I will betroth you to Me forever;
Yes, I will betroth you to Me
In righteousness and justice,
In loving kindness and mercy;
I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness,
And you shall know the LORD." (Hos 2:19,
20)*

When we say our vows before the Lord, we take on the covenant of marriage. This promise of lifelong commitment is made before the congregation and God. Those who have been married for many years still need to consciously commit to each other on a regular basis. When we focus on our commitment to each other, it broadens our life.

A lifelong love story is deliberate. It is intentional. It is a choice to look ahead and not back. A healthy marriage doesn't happen by accident—it is a result of the daily choice to obey God's teachings about marriage.

GROWING TOGETHER SPIRITUALLY

As I got to know my husband better before marriage, I discovered he had qualities that I adored, which were also

qualities that I frankly didn't have. I found him more attractive and more intelligent as our relationship developed and we got to know each other better. When I was around him, I felt more complete, and we simply couldn't wait to see each other.

We set aside a time to pray each day and read the Bible, and I looked up to him as a spiritual leader, even without him knowing it. One day, when we were talking over the phone, my husband started sharing his shortcomings, fears, and doubts about certain matters. As I listened, I validated his feelings and actually felt closer to him.

Although I had not expressed my concerns to him, I also had worries about embracing a life together and dealing with problems that could arise in the future. I really liked my husband's initiation in establishing an "us" approach, where both of us contributed to the relationship and were willing to share everything.

Since he was so willing to open up about his feelings, we started talking about how to handle tough times together. This conversation made me feel connected to him on a more intimate level.

Intimacy often refers to the physical relationship, but it actually means communication and closeness at the deepest level. When a couple experiences mental, spiritual, and emotional intimacy, not only does it reduce loneliness and self-centeredness, it really strengthens their lives. Such closeness needs to be cultivated moment by moment, day by day, month by month, year by year.

We naturally assume that if we let our future spouse see our weaknesses, they won't like us anymore. The fact is that we are all imperfect and emotional human beings. But it is our imperfections and our

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willingness to share our deepest feelings that draw us closer to each other.

When we share our weaknesses with each other and how we need each other's prayer, when we confess our faults to each other, when we share a part of ourselves that we are confused about or are ashamed of, we take intimacy to a new depth. Reaching this stage requires that we be humble and accepting of one another.

Some couples talk, but they sugarcoat or camouflage their true selves so that they present someone completely different. This is not healthy. No one can keep the act going forever. It is important to be yourself, instead of trying to hide behind a mask.

We should not try to impress our future spouse by concealing who we are. It says in Romans 12:9, "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good." If we want a lasting and deep marriage, we must remove any disguises as fully as possible.

In marriage, honesty about who we are makes our connection real. It makes our need for God real, and it forces us to draw more spiritual strength from our heavenly Father. He will equip us with His strength. When we pray for each other's spiritual growth, we are demonstrating God's love in a powerful way.

WORKING THROUGH ISSUES TOGETHER

There is no doubt that marriage is full of challenges. There are issues at predictable developmental stages, and there are issues that result from the unpredictabilities of life.

On top of that, there are values that need to be re-evaluated. There are struggles that need to be overcome. There are conflicts that need to be resolved. Many adjustments must be made. Marriage is indeed a people-maturing machine.

We have to be prepared to take on these difficulties together even

before getting married. In the course of engagement, you may be asked to face something you didn't expect. When you hear your fiancé's honesty, you may have conflicting emotions—you care for him but are overwhelmed by what he's saying. It can be unsettling.

At this point, you really only have one choice—to kneel down in front of God and ask Him to give you the wisdom to discover solutions, find godly guidance, and decide as a couple how to resolve this issue.

It is important to work together. Sometimes, when a couple has a disagreement, one person will try to force the other to accept his or her views. This attitude is not about true love but about having power and control.

Other couples will prefer to withdraw and not deal with the issues. As a result, the relationship will die as they become emotionally divorced.

Many couples find it hard to love and respect their spouse because they have checked out of the marriage mentally and emotionally. When encountering difficulties, it's important not to lose yourself. Instead of pressuring each other or avoiding the problem, work things out by communicating and listening to each other, putting the issue in prayer, and coming up with a solution together.

I have learned that it is seldom God's will for me to run from a difficult situation. If I don't learn in one area, God just gives me another chance to learn somewhere else. Ignoring a problem won't make it disappear. It only gets worse.

I remember my husband and I had moments when we faced difficult patches in our relationship. As we surrendered to God's guidance and brought everything

to Him, it really forced us to grow even more spiritually. Even though some issues took time to resolve, we kept our faith and trusted in God.

God has much to teach us when we work through issues. Instead of being torn apart as a couple, we need to come together as a team to face whatever life sends us. We can't have moments claiming "This is your problem, not mine," but must find the best solution together.

My husband and I came out of crises and issues stronger both individually and as a team. We also discovered that both of us respected and valued each other so much more after overcoming these difficulties.

A relationship gains deeper strength when it is stretched to the breaking point and doesn't break. Indeed, many couples who have come to a mutually agreeable solution not only glorify God but also benefit each other.

UNDERSTANDING OUR ROLES

Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Eph 5:33)

A Husband's Role

The Bible says that the husband is the head of the wife (Eph 5:23). Here, and in the verses following, the apostle Paul charges all husbands with a loving leadership of their wives. But being the head does not mean being bossy and throwing around authority.

A husband's love for his wife has to be so strong that he is willing to die to save her, just as Christ loved the church! It means that the wife is looking to the

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husband to sacrifice his own comfort and convenience and make decisions on what is best for the family.

My husband knows that I constantly depend on him to lead me with his character and strength. Because he is the head, I look to him to back me up in all areas of married life. I am going to look to him for leadership when hard decisions about career, having kids, parenting, or other issues arise. Most of all, I am going to look to him to set the pace spiritually.

I never once met a wife who had a problem with her husband being a spiritual leader of their home, where the husband was really laying down his life for her, looking out for her needs, and meeting those needs. But I have met many wives who struggled with husbands who weren't spiritually leading their homes, who weren't laying down their lives and loving their wives like how Christ loves the church.

It's important to remember that God charges husbands to be the spiritual leader, to love and die for their wives. This is the kind of leader wives want and need. This is the divine plan from God.

"For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD." (Gen 18:19)

It is essential to the spiritual health of the children and wife to have the husband set up the family's devotion time. In my family, even though my husband may sometimes be tired from work, he still continues the routine he established of reading the Bible and praying together as a family. It is a blessing for our child to see his father setting a good example in a family's spiritual life.

A Wife's Role

While the husband's role is to love his wife unconditionally and die for her, the wife's role is to submit and respect her husband in all circumstances. Many sisters cringe when they hear "submit." They ask, "Why should women be inferior to men? Why should I follow his preferences? Does that mean if I questioned anything, I would be viewed as not submissive? Is submission the only way to ensure a blessed marriage?"

Being submissive does not mean wives are not allowed to speak up or give their perspective. It does not mean being the lesser of the two. Husbands are not called to treat their wives like a child, and wives are not called to be their husbands' clone. Husbands are not the only decision maker in the family.

Being submissive means respecting the husband and taking his lead. When difficulties arise, it may mean yielding to and being understanding of the husband's decisions, despite having a different view. A wife needs to fully believe in her husband and be confident in his leadership.

I feel that as a wife, I should take on the role of an encourager. I tell myself that each day, I need to be ready to comfort, not criticize, my husband. I need to speak words of encouragement and give him emotional nourishment. It's one of the reasons why a husband needs his wife's respect and support.

As I strive to make God the center of my life, I also pray daily, "Please be the head of my husband. I usher him to You on a daily basis so that You will lead him and speak to him today."

Imagine a wife who speaks words of wisdom and encouragement to her

husband. It will be like pouring sunshine, water, and nutrients on a plant. When the husband feels encouraged and respected, he will continue to bloom and grow. This is because the wife is not trying to change her husband, but she loves and respects her husband through God.

Likewise, husbands also need to do the same for their wives. We have the power to bring life by giving encouragement to each other.

God's love flows to the husband as the wife offers words that encourage, affirm, and build him up as he grows closer in his relationship with God and with her. This is very precious in a marriage. When a wife truly respects and loves her husband, this is when they can be "heirs of the gracious gifts of life—so that nothing may hinder [their] prayers" (1 Pet 3:7).

SHARING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Having unreasonable and unrealistic expectations will cause a lot of harm in a marriage. So what can we do to avoid this? First, we must list our expectations and examine them at the beginning of marriage. Be completely honest with your spouse. Share and clarify what they are.

Marriage is a real eye-opener. Once you get specific with your spouse about your expectations, you will discover that both of you have different opinions, thoughts, and habits. Remember, your wife or your husband is human, which makes that person unique and imperfect. Therefore, we need to give up unrealistic expectations. If not, they will only lead us to frustration and more disappointment.

Here are some examples of unrealistic expectations:

- We will never have disagreements because we love one another.
- If you truly love me, you will never criticize me.
- My needs are always the most important. I will not need to verbally share my needs with you if you truly love me. You should know my needs.

To be able to share the rest of your life with the one you love and to seek after God with an ever-deepening understanding is the crowning glory of marriage.

We cannot demand or force love from others. In a healthy marriage, there is constant communication and accommodation of one another. We need to respond to each other's needs even if they are not the same as ours.

Sharing our expectations, whether unrealistic or not, brings us to reflect, "Am I placing demands on my spouse? How are my expectations affecting my spouse? What can I do in order to improve our marriage?"

Marriage requires maturity, and that means both spouses need to face reality, abandon unrealistic expectations, and work on being transformed by God's teaching and His love. This requires character, maturity, self-restraint, and humility.

We shouldn't drive our spouse away from us, but draw our lover close to our heart. We must be willing to adjust and re-adjust our position to accommodate our spouse.

Once we surrender to God, His love will flow through our marriage. Fears, demands, and differences will diminish.

There is no doubt that marriage takes enormous amounts of love, energy, courage, and determination. As long as we keep our love story intentional, we can feel we are the apple of our spouse's eye. After all, who doesn't love being loved? We can definitely experience that in a marriage.

After sixteen years of marriage, I can honestly say that my husband and I have a much deeper, more mature love than on our wedding day. We have worked

through difficult moments, and I truly feel that he loves me, believes in me, fights for me, and encourages me to see myself through the word of God. He opens me up to grow, to learn, and even to change. I feel loved every day.

To be able to share the rest of your life with the one you love and to seek after God with an ever-deepening understanding is the crowning glory of marriage. To be able to intentionally nurture the inner spiritual life in a marriage will give you a greater sense of purpose and meaning.

Husbands and wives are not meant to depend solely on each other—God must be the head of the family. As we invite God into our marriage, we can definitely experience all the promises in the Bible—love, joy, peace, protection, provisions, deliverance and many more!

All glory to our Lord Jesus Christ! ★



Becoming One's Own Boss: A Christian's Journey

Shawn Chou—San Jose, California, USA

January 31, 1998, is one of the most memorable days of my life that I will never forget. Every time I get a chance to share my story, I'm reminded of the amazing grace God bestowed on me and my family.

THE DECISION

One day, out of the blue, my boss asked me if I had ever thought about starting my own business. I had nine years of marketing experience that would serve me well if I chose to do that. I had never thought about becoming my own boss because I didn't believe I would ever be successful. There is a Chinese saying that goes, "No trickery, no business." I just do not have the personality or mindset to be a businessman.

Moreover, I had personally witnessed a few friends start their own business only to end up losing their savings and putting their families in dire situations. So I questioned myself over and over if I could survive on this path before finally making a decision on what I should do.

I had toyed with a few ideas of what I wanted to do with my career for the rest of my life, and these considerations became more serious after my boss's suggestion. I wanted to spend more time with my elderly parents, who lived in San Jose, so I would have to find a job there. My wife suggested I study for a computer science degree so that I could change industries. But I felt too old to be a student and to start something new all over again.

I really struggled for quite some time with the idea of starting my own business.

It was a major decision and I really prayed to the Lord and asked for His guidance. After a period of prayers, I felt great peace in my heart and confidence to give it a try. I believed God would give me signs if He did not want me to continue down this path.

It was a major turning point in my life. I felt like I had lost my career after I quit a successful job that I enjoyed over nine years. My wife had also given up her dream to be a licensed pharmacist in New Jersey. But we had faith that somehow, the Lord would provide.

On January 31, 1998, I moved from New Jersey to California to start my own business.



**A BOSS IN FAVOR WITH GOD:
TRUST AND OBEY**

Starting up a business takes a lot of hard work. I still remember walking into my office at 6 am. It felt even harder to do this on dark winter mornings, when most people were still asleep. Early mornings were prime business time for me because most of the suppliers I bought from and the customers I sold to were in earlier time zones.

I thank God for sustaining a sense of determination in me, which is crucial when a business is only in its initial stages. However, I had other worries, too. How do I go about marketing my company? How do I earn the trust of suppliers and clients? Since English is not my native language, will people even consider doing business with me?

I had my worries, but trusting in God was all that I could do. If it was His will, I trusted that He would give me His blessings.

Another challenge I faced was greed.

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Tim 6:10)

In the first year of my company, I had a chance to gain more profit by concealing reduced prices from suppliers. If I didn't share this information with my clients, I could earn more money because my agreement was to share the profit margin with my clients. But if I didn't tell them, they would not know or find out.

But I told myself that I needed to be an honest businessman because I was one of the chosen people of God. I could make a little more money by not disclosing some information, but doing that would provoke the wrath of God. So I told my clients that my supplier reduced his selling price. I knew this would sound foolish to many people, but I believed God would guide me and bless me if I kept His words.

Left on its own, human desire knows no satisfaction. Owning one's business brings with it opportunities to commit different degrees of fraud so as to maximize profits. A Christian is not spared from such temptations.

For example, I could deceptively increase the weight of the products I shipped to my customers and charge them more money. I knew how it could be done if I was greedy and wanted to earn more money. But I always swept such thoughts out of my mind as quickly as they appeared. We need to train our minds not to let evil thoughts linger.

Money can divert our hearts away from God's words. To overcome such temptations, we need to cultivate our spiritual life daily and constantly meditate upon God's words in our mind and prayers.

BUMPS ALONG THE WAY—TRUSTING HIM STILL

Owning a business involves a lot of risk. I have been cheated a few times by either my suppliers or customers since I started my business.

I started out being too naïve and trusting. In my company's first year, I agreed to the terms of open payment with a customer in Bolivia because I thought he was a very trustworthy person. I continued to ship new products to him even before he paid me for previous shipments.

It turned out that the payments were uncollectible. By the time I found out that he was a fraud and had closed his US bank account, I had lost \$110,000. That was all of the savings I had.

This happened about the same time my beloved mother passed away in a car accident. I loved my mother very much. I moved my family to California just to be close to her. With this double blow, I felt like I had fallen into the bottom of the abyss.

But I had to stand back up. Instead of regretting the decision to move to California and beating myself up for losing

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so much money, I turned to the memories of the precious seven months my family had with my mother in her final days. I recalled the joy on her face whenever she was with my children.

It was a difficult period but God guided me through it. In spite of encountering such difficulties, my mind was still very peaceful. I did not feel any panic or lose confidence. I could even see many positive aspects of my decision amid the setbacks.

I found that I had more time to help with church work because I had better flexibility and control over my time as my own boss. I used to have to work overtime and even on Sabbath days as an employee. Being my own boss meant more time to nourish my spiritual life. This realization gave me much courage not to let the major financial loss get me down.

I had not planned to serve the Lord more than I previously did. But I could feel the Spirit compelling me and giving me more opportunities to serve Him during this time.

I also gradually realized that it was not God's will for me to expand my company but to serve Him more instead. Once in a while, I would have some ambitious ideas and even the opportunities to expand my company by putting in more time and money. But, thank God, those ideas faded away after studying the words of God in my daily spiritual cultivation.

A BOSS IN FAVOR WITH MEN

As Christians, we should always strive to be in favor with both God and men (Lk 2:52) in all our ways. In my business dealings, I tell myself to adhere to this same principle.

If we constantly seek God while being our own boss, we will have the opportunity to improve our relationship with Him and be blessed by Him in our work.

Having your own business means having employees who work for you. It is important to treat employees with love and care. This includes showing sincere concern for their well-being and acknowledging their efforts.

I had an employee who worked for me for almost four years. I really thank God for giving me such good help. I liked him because he was a sincere and honest person, not to mention responsible and hardworking.

In 2005, business was really slow and sales were at an all-time low for six months. I told this employee that I had to let him go in one month's time and that he should start looking for another job. He pleaded with me to reconsider my decision because he had a mortgage to pay and needed to support his poor family.

I realized how badly he needed the job and how much of an impact it would have on many people if I let him go. Even though I was in a tight financial situation myself, I decided that he could continue to work for me until a good job offer came his way, and he stayed for two more years.

My relationship with this employee developed into true friendship. Currently, he works for a large Internet company, and we still go out to lunch once in a while. He still has keys to my office and is free to visit anytime he wants. When I have problems with my computers, he's the one who fixes them.

The Bible gives us good guidelines on how to be a good boss. "Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master

in heaven" (Col 4:1). Pay and benefits are not the only ways to keep good employees. Beyond reasonable pay and benefits, I believe there are other areas in which we need to be right and fair to our employees, including our attitude and the way we treat them.

WANT TO BECOME YOUR OWN BOSS?

We can make plans but we can't force our plans to happen, because everything is under the will of God, who holds our future. If you have ideas of starting your own business, a period of praying is necessary, perhaps even fasting, so you understand His will.

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." (Jas 4:13-15)

If your intention to become your own boss is due to greediness or some other wrong motive, then you may not receive blessing from our Lord. It doesn't mean you will fail in your business, but you may end up losing your faith.

Money and power should not be our priorities because these things do not give us true peace or help us in our spiritual journey. Whatever career path we are considering, we should evaluate how certain factors would impact our faith. At no point in time should we ever imagine we are strong enough to engage in battle with worldly distractions, and we should not think that we will never fall.

If we constantly seek God while being our own boss, we will have the opportunity to improve our relationship with Him and be blessed by Him in our work. ★



After laboring for the first half of my senior year in high school on seemingly endless college applications while juggling several Advanced Placement and college classes and then waiting anxiously for acceptance letters to arrive in the mailbox, I was determined to choose the right college for the sake of my future.

This was the most important decision that I had faced in all seventeen years of my life. I was expected to make my college decision by May 1, 2009.

THE BIG DECISION

The day before my decision deadline, I faced a dilemma. I had narrowed my choices down to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) or the University of California, San Diego

(UCSD). After I got home from school, I spent the entire afternoon lying in bed, debating between the two.

UCLA seemed like the more logical choice because it was prestigious and top-notch in terms of sciences, and I was planning to major in biochemistry in preparation for medical school. Furthermore, my friends and family were all in support of me choosing this university. I knew that going to UCLA would enable me to better prepare for graduate school as well as my future career.

However, after visiting the San Diego House of Prayer that spring when called in for an interview at the university, I felt more inclined to go to UCSD. Growing up in Baldwin Park Church, I never had the

chance to participate much in holy work. Perhaps it was because the congregation was large and there were so many people available to help, or perhaps there were other reasons. Either way, I was not able to serve God as much as I wanted to.

Seeing that the San Diego House of Prayer had such a small congregation and a deficit of workers, I knew that I would be able to find some kind of holy work, however small, to do there. If I went to UCLA, I would continue to attend my childhood church, where I would not have as much opportunity to serve.

After pondering and praying about it for hours, I still couldn't come up with an answer.

So I decided that I would simply flip a coin. If it landed heads up, I would go to

UCLA. If it landed tails up, I would go to UCSD. I flipped. When I looked, the coin had landed on top of my blanket, wedged in a crease. It was neither heads nor tails. I was back to square one.

Finally, there was a knock on my door, and my dad came in. He sat down at the edge of my bed and told me just what I needed to hear. He said to me, “Make the choice you think God wants you to make, and just do what you think is right. Life always continues on, despite the choices people make.”

I began to realize that, no matter what choices we make, God’s love for us never disappears. As long as our decisions reflect our own love for God, He will surely provide. Since I knew which choice I would have to make in order to better serve God, I submitted my intent to register to UCSD with a peaceful heart.

UNEXPECTED BLESSINGS

That June, I graduated from high school, and, after an exciting summer vacation abroad, I braced myself for the transition from high school to college. Truthfully, I was slightly nervous and intimidated because I had no idea what to expect—who my roommates would be, what they would be like, how I would plan my class schedule, what independence would really be like. There was so much that I had yet to experience.

Immediately after arriving at San Diego, however, everything just seemed to fall in place, and I knew that I had made the right choice coming to this school. It was God’s abundant blessing that I was able to evade the inevitable loneliness of college life, get involved with holy work, and also keep up with my academics.

A Family in Christ

The first blessing that God gave to me was the warmth of a family in Christ. Even though I was away from home and on my own for the first time, I never really had the chance to feel lonely.

By the first week, I had already been invited by the brothers and sisters at the prayer house to a welcome dinner for all the new students. We sat around the dinner table and shared a delicious meal together. I felt so at home.

Throughout the rest of the quarter, I continued to fellowship with all the brothers and sisters. Sometimes we would go down to the beach, sometimes we would go out for dinner and dessert, sometimes we would cook together, and, every other Tuesday, we had campus fellowship.

Despite having roommates and suitemates who partied quite often, I never felt tempted to join them because I had my friends from church to spend time with. I thank God that He gave me such a caring family in San Diego.

Participating in Holy Work

The second blessing that God gave me was the blessing of holy work. As I had imagined, I finally had the opportunity to participate in church work. However, the opportunity that presented itself was one that I had been both expecting and dreading.

San Diego House of Prayer lacked pianists. Most people who know I was raised in a musical family expect me to be able to play the piano for church, but this has never been the case. I have always had trouble sight-reading, and, whenever people sing along while I play, even if it is just a few people that I am very familiar with, I get extremely nervous and stop playing almost immediately.

Even if I am not sight-reading music for the first time and have practiced a hymn over and over again, I still panic when others sing along. The only time I am

able to play smoothly is when I am alone. Nevertheless, I practiced whenever I had the chance during lunch on Sabbaths or after service on Friday nights, all the while never having the confidence that I would ever be able to actually play for hymn singing.

Toward the end of the quarter, I was finally asked to play during a Friday night service. Reflexively, I wanted to say no, but then I reminded myself that this was the reason I came to San Diego in the first place. I couldn’t let my lack of confidence get in the way of service for God. I made up my mind and replied, “I will try my best.”

Before playing, I said a silent prayer, and somehow everything turned out just fine. I didn’t embarrass myself like I thought I would. Granted, my playing was far from perfect, but I successfully played for hymn singing that night. Without God’s guidance, I could never have overcome my fear. He enabled me to serve Him, and I was so grateful.

Academics

The final blessing that God bestowed on me was in academics. Since the start of the quarter, I had been struggling with chemistry. Even though I read the textbook meticulously and thoroughly, I felt like I would never understand it and could never do more than a problem or two out of the ten-problem assignments.

In the academic quarter system, the weeks pass by swiftly, and, before I knew it, it was time for final exams. I became increasingly stressed as finals approached, and it didn’t help that all three of my finals were on the exact same day. I would have to sit through nine straight hours of examinations from 8:30 in the morning to 6:00 at night.

I began to realize that no matter what choices we make, God’s love for us never disappears. As long as our decisions reflect our own love for God, He will surely provide.

If we can put God first in our lives, we can also be confident that God will bless us abundantly not only with material blessings but, more importantly, with spiritual blessings.

The night before my finals, I had given up studying for chemistry. I was in despair. Would I already have to give up on my plans for medical school?

While I prayed before going to bed, I simply told God that I had tried my best and that I would put everything in His hands. I also told Him that I didn't want to disappoint my parents or make them worry.

They had done so much for me to get me to where I was, supporting all of my decisions, pushing me to do several extracurricular activities, staying up late with me on the nights that I had particularly large amounts of work to do, not to mention putting in a considerable amount of money and effort to ensure that I would succeed in the future. I wanted at the least to show them that I appreciated their efforts by doing well in school.

Thanks to the grace of God, everything turned out well. Despite having skipped an entire question on my chemistry final, which only had ten questions, my score was a sturdy thirty points above the class average. The other two finals that I took also ended up just as well.

GOD OPENED MY EYES

If I have learned anything besides academic knowledge after my first quarter in college, it would be that God truly blesses those who have the heart to serve Him. Furthermore, God will undoubtedly answer the prayers of those who have pure motivations.

I am so thankful that I made the decision to attend UCSD because God has

opened my eyes and helped me to grow spiritually in such a short period of time. I realize that, as long as I put God first in my life, everything else will fall into place. All I have to do is seek earnestly for Him and trust in Him.

Although at times we all face decisions where we are tempted to rely on our own understanding and take the road that furthers our worldly pursuits, we need to realize that God is far more important than anything this world has to offer. If we can put God first in our lives, we can also be confident that God will bless us abundantly not only with material blessings but, more importantly, with spiritual blessings. We can therefore receive twice the blessings if we set our sights on God. ★



Homeland Bound—Redirecting Life’s Path Post Middle-Age

Sarah Lin—Chicago, Illinois, USA

With my children grown up and no longer in need of immediate parental care, I find myself having more free time to spare. This stage of life has often been termed the “empty nest” stage. But an empty nest does not mean an empty life, and I have found that it is a golden time for personal reflection and growth.

As I get older, losing people close to me makes the fragility of life a reality, inevitably leading me to reflect upon my faith journey. My uncle has five sons, three of whom have already passed away. And ever since I learned that my elderly mother fainted at church during Sabbath service, I started my annual trips to visit her in Taiwan.

For myself, my doctor informed me that I had high levels of bad cholesterol

and advised me to change my diet and exercise more. With these warnings, I am reminded to also do a “health checkup” of my spiritual life.

As I pass middle age and head towards old age, I realize the need to refocus my life, especially after my children have grown up. It is not merely the time to prepare for a smooth transition into old age—it is the time to prepare for life in eternity.

WALKING WITH GOD

For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. (1 Tim 4:8, 9)

With the additional spare time I have gained, I started to take better care of my physical and spiritual health. I added regular workouts to my routine because of my high cholesterol. I find that I’m more apt to stick with a regular exercise program when I combine spiritual cultivation and physical exercise. Gaining spiritual nutrition provides the motivation to persist with my exercise routine, and the benefits I actually reap far outweigh those of the physical exercise alone.

I enjoy walking for forty-five to sixty minutes most days of the week. Walking can be dull, but listening to sermons during my walks counteracts the tedium. Meditation on the sermon also makes time fly. Reading articles in Holy Spirit Monthly or Manna when using exercise

equipment also takes my mind off the exercise.

I feel as if God talks to me as I work out. Through the sermons I listen to and the articles I read, I am often amazed at how quick and responsive God is in answering my questions, issues, and needs communicated in prayer. My daily walks around the neighborhood are like walking with God in the garden—a quiet and sweet hour with Him.

PREPARING FOR THE END OF THE RACE

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb 12:1, 2)

As my children have grown up, I have found more time for reflection. This is a good time to also evaluate my spiritual life and faith. A Christian's goal is to finish the race and meet God face to face. As I move nearer to the end, I reflect more and more on whether I am ready to meet God.

For years, I went to church regularly and participated in many areas of church work. However, the motivation behind my participation varied from obligation, maintaining my reputation, to proving myself to others.

Serving the Lord became a burden and lost its meaning because I served for the wrong motives. I have come to realize that even worshipping God through heartfelt hymn singing, praying, and attending services is serving Him.

I do not need to do great things, prove myself through holy work, or maintain a position on the church council. Now I enjoy serving my Lord in whatever

capacity I can, just as described by the hymn, "Something for Thee."

Furthermore, I want to serve Him in areas that I had previously considered to be my weaknesses and beyond my abilities to perform. I pray that "the power of Christ may rest upon [me]" (2 Cor 12:9). Nowadays, when I serve in church, I recognize that people's opinion of me should not be the motivating force. Instead, I do my best to bring glory to God's name and to edify people around me.

At this stage of life, what I need to focus on is to pursue a closer relationship with God, as I long to meet Him face to face for eternity in the heavenly homeland.

CONTINUING A HERITAGE OF FAITH

*That the generation to come might know them,
The children who would be born,
That they may arise and declare them to their children,
That they may set their hope in God,
And not forget the works of God,
But keep His commandments. (Ps 78:6, 7)*

Although my children are adults, I still hope to be a source of guidance and support for them, especially in their walk of faith. Paul reminded Timothy that his faith was modeled after his grandmother and mother (2 Tim 1:5). I recall that my mother often told us the testimonies of my grandmother, passing on great examples of faith to me.

My children now need to strengthen their own faith and relationship with God. As much as I would like to, I cannot run

At this stage of life, what I need to focus on is to pursue a closer relationship with God, as I long to meet Him face to face for eternity in the heavenly homeland.

the race for them. But I continue to pray for them, asking for God to guide them and sustain their faith.

My daughter is currently in college and has been actively participating in church work and her campus fellowship. It is a pleasure to see her grow in faith. I enjoy discussing the Bible with her and strengthening our bond and friendship along the way.

I also write down my own testimonies in the hope that my children will read them and pass them onto the next generation as part of their heritage of faith. My brother built a Chinese website that contains many testimonies from our extended family. His intention is to leave a "cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1) for our family members and descendants.

I hope that my husband and I have set good examples for our children to follow as our parents did for us. Then, one day, we shall all meet together in our eternal heavenly home.

RECONNECTING AS HEIRS TOGETHER OF THE GRACE OF LIFE

Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun. (Eccl 9:9)

In the process of raising children and sustaining a livelihood, years can simply fly by. As I once read, "The days are long but the years are short." When our children still lived at home, my husband and I devoted much time to them and consequently had less time for each other.

With the children now grown up, it's time for us to rekindle our love and pay more attention to each other. Marriage in the Lord is a bond between two people who should be sharing the grace of life blessed by God: "Husbands, likewise, dwell with [your wives] with understanding, giving honor to the wife,

as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Pet 3:7).

God has blessed me with a good husband. We both held full-time jobs when raising our children, and he shared the workload of household chores and childcare without a murmur. These days, we enjoy each other's company by taking walks together, going to the fitness center, or just doing grocery shopping. It is a blessing to have him as my constant companion now that our children have left the house.

My husband and I have been complementary partners in serving the Lord over the years. We will continue running our race together as heirs of the grace of life. For this, I really thank God.

ON THE WAY HOME

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know." (Jn 14:2-4)

With children no longer at home, it is easier for me to travel. In recent years, whenever I go back to my native Taiwan, I relate more closely to the Chinese aphorism, "Falling leaves return to their roots." Even though the roots may have grown so differently from when I left, such feelings of nostalgia bring out the goal of the heavenly home ever so poignantly.

The chorus of the hymn "Mid Pleasures and Palaces" says, "Home, home, sweet, sweet home! Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home!" Similarly, the lyrics of the hymn "When We All Get to Heaven" remind us that "[i]n the mansions bright and blessed, He'll prepare for us a place. When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be!"

As I am discovering, it is especially important for empty nesters to constantly think about returning to our

heavenly home. While there are many responsibilities that we still take care of and much of life to still enjoy, it is important to draw closer to God as we near the end of the race.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. (Jude 20, 21)

If we can follow this teaching closely, we can be assured that we are heading back to our heavenly home.★

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Author Guidelines and Editorial Calendar

Issue #67:

Topic: The Bible

Articles due: March 1, 2010

The Bible is the foundation of our faith, and members can continue to learn much from Scripture. Within it lie many answers and solutions to life issues we face on a daily basis. God further tells us we will be blessed simply by reading His words. How then do we approach and incorporate Bible study and reading into our lives? How does personal Bible study differ from group Bible study, and what are some tools and resources that would help facilitate our learning?

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

GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES

CONTENT

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

GRAMMAR/STYLE

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

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

Christian Living

A Christian Living article gives practical biblical guidance on real-life issues and how to use Jesus' teachings in our daily lives.

Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Bible Study

A Bible Study explores a passage or character from the Bible and draws out the teachings for readers to apply to their lives.

Article length: 2000 words.

Doctrinal Study

A Doctrinal Study examines an aspect of True Jesus Church beliefs and may present it in comparison to other beliefs.

Article length: 2000 words.

Exhortation

An Exhortation encourages and admonishes the reader in different aspects of the Christian faith.

Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Testimony

A Testimony recounts an experience in the Lord that will encourage and edify the reader.

Article length: 1000-1500 words.

Creative Writing

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

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Please email electronic files of articles (Microsoft Word) to manna@tjc.org, or send hardcopy and CD to:

Manna

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

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

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

True Jesus Church

Articles of Faith

Jesus the True God

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

Holy Bible

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

Church

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

Baptism

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

Holy Spirit

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

Footwashing

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

Holy Communion

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

Sabbath Day

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

Salvation

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

Last Day

The Lord's Second Coming will take place on the last day when He descends from heaven to judge the world: the righteous will receive eternal life, while the wicked will be eternally condemned.

TRUE JESUS CHURCH CONTACT INFORMATION

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

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