

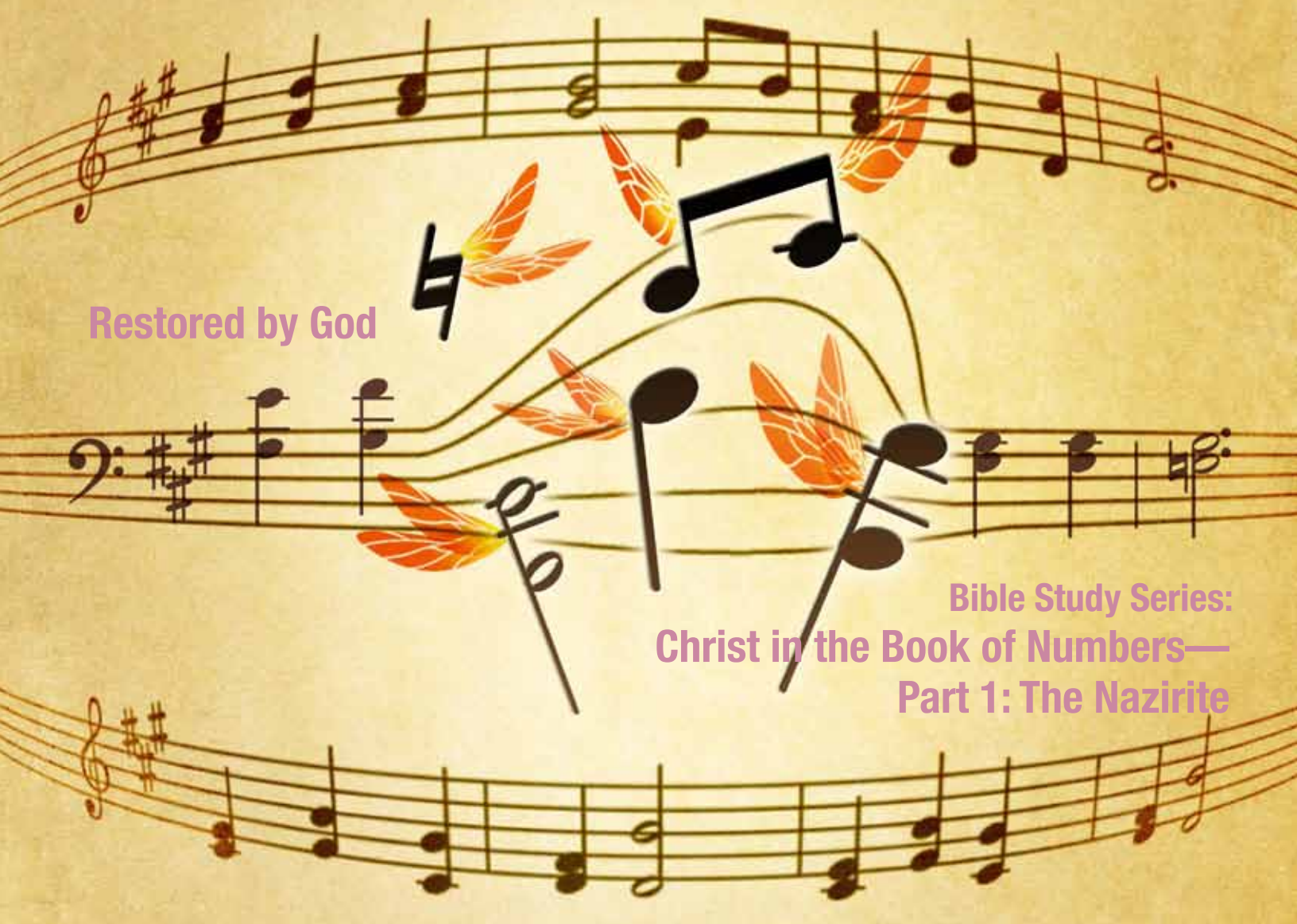
MANNA

ISSUE 63 | Music

Music and Worship

Restored by God

Bible Study Series:
Christ in the Book of Numbers—
Part 1: The Nazirite



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

Music

Dear Reader,

Have you ever realized that music penetrates our lives? Whether we listen to our favorite songs on our iPods or in a concert hall, sing hymns at church or take a piano lesson, whether we sing a lullaby to our kids or hum a tune while in the shower – music is our constant companion; even if we are not passionate about it, we still hear it in every bird’s song, in each shop or mall and whenever we watch a TV ad or football game or listen to the news.

Indeed, music is a powerful tool and can be used in many ways. We use it to entertain ourselves, to relax, to encourage, to teach, to connect and unify people, but also to warn and to draw attention.

Yet, what does God say about music? How did music come about and how should we use music in our congregational worship, spiritual fellowship, personal devotion and service to God? What about secular music? How can our choice of music affect our thinking and our faith?

The authors of this issue’s theme articles provide answers to these questions, based on the Bible and their own experiences. As we read their sharing, let us reflect on our own use of music in our daily lives and at church. Let us make full use of the power of music to build up our relationship with God and to bring the gospel of salvation to the people in this world.

In fact, Christ’s salvation work has been proclaimed long before Jesus came into this world. God’s plan to save mankind has been hidden in the Old Testament in the form of prefigurations. Our new Bible study series Christ in the Book of Numbers will give us a deeper insight into these prefigurations of Christ and His salvation work. It is hoped that this series will also help us to better understand God’s plan and His superior wisdom.

God’s wisdom is far above ours. Quite often, we may simply be unable to understand certain things in the Bible, in the world around us or in our lives. However, the writers of this issue exhort us to trust in God and to put our faith in Him during these times. In doing so, we will experience true peace, comfort and joy.

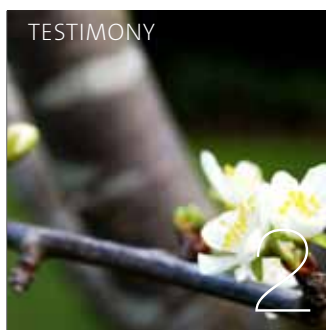
THE EDITOR

EDITOR IN CHIEF: Anna Khoo
MANAGING EDITOR: Tzu-Ann Chen
REVIEW BOARD: Andrew Chu (Australia), Fook-Fah Chong (UK), KC Tsai (Canada), Peter Shee (Singapore), Stephen Ku (US)

Manna (ISSN1528-8617) is published quarterly by the True Jesus Church, IA Department of Literary Ministry, 21217 Bloomfield Avenue, Lakewood, CA 90715 USA.
Copyright © 2011 True Jesus Church. All rights reserved.
U.S. Postmaster: send change-of-address forms to 21217 Bloomfield Avenue, Lakewood, CA 90715 USA.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the New King James Version.
Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

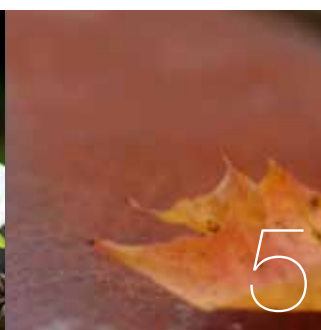
TABLE OF CONTENTS



TESTIMONY

2

Restored by God
Learning to rely on God through Graves' disease.
by Esther Chiew



5

Grace upon Grace
A brother recounts the blessings that he received towards the end of his life.
by Tay Hian Siak



8

Guided by God's Hand
How the Holy Spirit led a sister to find the true God and salvation.
by Siah Chin Luan



BIBLE STUDY SERIES

12

The Christ in the Book of Numbers—Part 1: The Nazirite
Spiritual lessons from the Nazirite as a prefiguration of Christ.
by Chen Sheng Quan



THEME SECTION

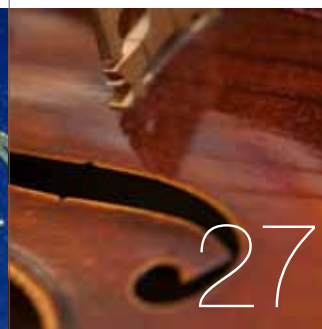
19

All the Sons of God Shouted for Joy
From the origin of music to the consecration of our hearts to God
by K.C. Tsai



22

Music and Worship
What it means to make music in our hearts to the Lord.



27

Musical Lessons in Faith, Service and Worship
What a sister has learnt through music in her journey of faith.
by Ascents



EXHORTATION

31

Jesus, Saviour, Pilot Me
Leaning on Jesus' breast to safely reach our beautiful shore.
by Peter Shee



COLUMNS

33

Workforce
A Perfect Job in Hard Times
God will provide, for He knows all our needs.
by Brooke Cheng



36

On Campus
With Every Break Comes Another Wave
A brother learns to see the importance of spiritual cultivation while juggling a full-time job, church work and graduate studies.
by Andy Wang

REFLECTIONS

Top to Bottom and Bottom to Top 39
In Him I Trust 41
A Beautiful Life 42

Call for Articles 44
Articles of Faith 45



Restored by God

Esther Chiew—Vancouver, Canada

NO SENSE OF REALITY

This past year has been one of the roughest and toughest of my life but also the most blessed and joyous. I sincerely thank God for my health and sanity. I now understand that we will be victorious no matter what we face, as long as we are standing on the side of God.

In the summer of 2009, I started to suffer from insomnia. I went to the doctor and he prescribed a very strong sleeping pill. However, over the following few months, I went back to my doctor three more times for new prescriptions because the pills lost their effectiveness after a while and I would suffer from insomnia again.

By the end of August, the sleep deprivation started to manifest itself after I hadn't slept for several days. My sense of reality was completely skewed: I had no sense of night or day, the time or date, and I couldn't tell the difference between what was real and what was imaginary.

My mother and sister supervised me all the time because they knew that something was not right, and they wanted

to make sure that I was okay. I started to feel less and less like myself and more like my body was just an empty shell.

In addition to these problems, I wasn't eating. They had to sit me down and practically force-feed me. I wasn't eating and I wasn't sleeping. All I would do was clean certain areas of the house over and over and over, like someone with obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Despite these issues, I was already enrolled in classes and had bought textbooks in preparation for my final year of university. When September rolled around, it was time to return to school.

However, on the first day of class, my mom wouldn't let me go by myself. She ended up driving me to the campus and, instead of letting me go to class, she brought me to the university's hospital.

Many different nurses, doctors, and psychologists evaluated me. They confirmed that I was disoriented and didn't know where I was or what day it was. None of them knew what was wrong with me, but they all said I needed serious help now.

NO SENSE OF SELF

I woke up some time later in a room I didn't recognize. My mom had taken me to Vancouver General Hospital and I was admitted as a patient.

I was very paranoid because I didn't know where I was, and I believed that the staff was trying to take me away from my family. I refused to tell anyone my name for fear of capture, and I also refused to acknowledge that I knew who my friends and family were.

I didn't want to take my medications so the nurses had to force me to swallow the pills. I also refused to eat, and I would wait for my mom to force-feed me. I didn't want to eat because I thought that the food was poisoned or drugged.

My mom came to see me every day during visiting hours. I could see the pain and tiredness in her, yet she didn't miss a day. Every night, I could hear her crying as she sang hymns for hours until she thought I fell asleep. This is truly the love of a mother and for this love, I am eternally grateful.

There was nothing to do at the hospital, and I wasn't interested in doing anything. My life was reduced to eating, walking up and down the halls, and waiting for my parents to appear. I felt completely helpless. I could not eat, sleep, or bathe on my own. My mom had to feed me and help me shower every day.

The person in the hospital had no resemblance to me. Other than my face, everything about me was different: My personality had melted away, my faith had disappeared, and my Christian self seemed like a distant memory.

I felt like a ghost. It seemed like I simply existed but was powerless to change anything. I was completely detached from my life, reality, faith, and God.

GOD'S PROTECTION

By this point, I had been moved to another part of the hospital, and it wasn't as nice as the ward I was in before. With the older rooms, colder temperatures, and unfriendly patients, my paranoia increased.

I thought of ending my life many times, because the suffering was just too unbearable. I tried to hurt myself on multiple occasions. I would scratch until I bled or tie rubber bands or towels around my neck. I even ran out to the sidewalk and tried to throw myself into oncoming traffic.

I knew what I was doing—I could see that I was harming myself physically, but I wasn't able to stop. I was numb to pain and a voice inside my head told me it would be too hard to start my life over.

I tried to understand how and why I ended up in the hospital. I replayed and magnified all of the mistakes I had made and the sins I had committed until I convinced myself that I deserved this punishment.

I felt desperate, hopeless, guilty, and unworthy to even turn to God. I no longer knew who this God I had believed in for twenty-one years was, and I even began to doubt His existence. I no longer remembered how to pray.

Thoughts of hurting myself and ending my life kept recurring, and I knew, even in that mental state, that all of these

incidents were actually spiritual battles. I weathered those dangerous moments because God was protecting me from harm.

I remember my father, a truth-seeker, telling me one day how great God was. He reminded me that the Lord would not forsake me and that I couldn't give up because He loved me. I was too lost and confused to see it then, but looking back, I thank God that my truth-seeking father understood how faithful God was and had faith in Him.

GOD'S LOVE AND GRACE

Over time and after many tests, the doctors concluded that I had Graves' disease. The disorder, where the thyroid is overactive, is actually quite common. The problems I had experienced—insomnia, anxiety, paranoia—were symptoms caused by my thyroid producing too many hormones.

Thoughts of hurting myself and ending my life kept recurring, and I knew, even in that mental state, that all of these incidents were actually spiritual battles. I weathered those dangerous moments because God was protecting me from harm.

As I improved through prayer and medication, I was gradually allowed to leave the ward. Depending on my behavior, I was allowed to go out for one, two, or four hours with my parents. Eventually, they let me stay out on an overnight pass, and I was allowed to sleep in my own bed at home.

Despite my diagnosis and treatment, recovery was slow and difficult. I remember that there were times when I put a knife or scissors to my throat when I was at home.

There were also a number of times when we were returning to the hospital that I got sudden panic attacks and felt claustrophobic. I demanded that my parents stop the car and let me out. I even tried to open the door in the middle of traffic. It got so bad that one parent

had to sit next to me, holding my hands down, while the other drove.

These were trying times for my whole family, and all we could do was pray and believe that God would help us. When I was hospitalized, I did not want to see anyone other than my parents. I did not want people to know where I was or see me in that condition, because the person in the hospital wasn't really me.

Nevertheless, church members visited me regularly. Looking back, I think every other patient in the ward was jealous because I had so many visitors each day. They came to show their care and concern, and seeing them reminded me of the person I used to be.

They would pray for me at the end of each visit, and at first, I couldn't even kneel down with them. I was too paranoid to close my eyes and I was much too restless to kneel in one place. On top of that, I felt ashamed and unworthy to come before God.

Slowly but surely, after many visits, I was able to sit still, close my eyes, and pray in tongues with them. All of these hospital visits are a testament to the grace and love of God manifested through the loving brothers and sisters.

Each day my parents would read the Bible and sing hymns with me. They would also play hymns on a little stereo in my room. At first, I told my parents to stop, but they persisted. Eventually, I was able to actually listen to and meditate on the word of God.

I was never mad at God for what had happened to me; instead, I was ashamed of how little faith I had during this time. Through the visits from church members and my parents' continual love and guidance, I regained some hope and faith.

After a month in the hospital, thanks to the grace of God, I recovered and was discharged and allowed to go home.

I remember my father, a truth-seeker, telling me one day how great God was. He reminded me that the Lord would not forsake me and that I couldn't give up because He loved me.

RELYING ON GOD

When I returned home, I discovered just how many people were praying and fasting for me. I thank God for everyone who interceded for me and ask that He remember their love and prayers. It was a very scary time, but I believe that through these events, everyone saw how wonderful our Lord truly is.

If God had not been on my side, it would have been a lost battle because I barely had the will to keep fighting. However, I held on to the remnants of my faith, and God kept me safe.

Looking back, I can see that God was always there, carrying me through and fighting my battles for me, even when I thought I was alone. As it says in Deuteronomy 31:6, "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."

I am doing very well now. I love life, school, and all the people in my life. I sleep, eat, and enjoy going to church even more than before. Each time I sing hymns, pray, or wash a dish, I thank God

*Being a Christian does not mean that we won't face any troubles and that our lives will always be smooth.
Being a Christian means that when you are in a crisis, there will be a Rock for you to lean on.*

because He has allowed me to do these things.

Before I got sick, I often felt overburdened and unable to handle my responsibilities at church. Now, everything that used to be a chore has become an opportunity, a blessing, and a privilege. It is so important to rely on God and cherish the opportunity to serve Him.

I have learned many lessons through this experience and am certain that I will continue to learn and grow in Christ. I now see that each day comes with happiness, sadness, trials, tribulations, triumphs, blessings, chastisements, peace, and trouble.

As it says in Psalm 40:1, 2:
*I waited patiently for the LORD;
And He inclined to me,
And heard my cry.
He also brought me up*

*out of a horrible pit,
Out of the miry clay,
And set my feet upon a rock,
And established my steps.*

If we are never put in the dark, never fall into the slimy pit, never face any trouble—then how can we see the beauty and wonder of His glorious light? How can He lift us up and set our feet upon a Rock? How can He be our wonderful Savior?

Being a Christian does not mean that we won't face any troubles and that our lives will always be smooth. Being a Christian means that when you are in a crisis, there will be a Rock for you to lean on and a throng of supporters helping to pull you out of the pit. ★



Grace upon Grace

Tay Hian Siak—Singapore

This testimony is based on the one given by the late Tay Hian Siak in April 2007. Uncle Tay, as he was popularly known, was born on October 16, 1925 and was baptized on December 17, 2000. In January 2006, Uncle Tay was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer.

In this testimony (delivered by his son, Tay Teck Kiang, as Uncle Tay's voice box had been removed), Uncle Tay recounts his conversion and the grace he received. Although his physical time on earth was running out, he fought a good spiritual fight. Although cancer had taken away his voice, he wanted to "speak" straight from his heart to, in his own words, "share with [everyone] some of my miraculous experiences after coming to the True Jesus Church."

ENTERING THE FOLD

I joined the church at the age of seventy-five. Actually, I had long wanted to be a Christian but often dropped the idea because of the Ten Commandments. Whenever I thought of the words, "Thou shall not do this and that..." I remembered that I had done this and that before and I felt I was still going to do this and that! I had broken so many commandments; I did not even dare to go to church.

However, after I retired at the age of seventy, I gave serious thought to going to church. I had wasted so many years and time was running out for me. I decided to visit my son's church to have a look. Not long after I made that resolution, my son actually invited me to attend a special service at the True Jesus Church in Adam Road.

This was in June 1999.

I continued to attend services after that, as I enjoyed the singing and found the people very friendly. In addition, the air-conditioned chapel was nice and cool! After about a year and a half, I was baptized along with my friend, Eddie, who had been regularly attending services with me.

RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

For a period of time after I had started attending services but had not yet received baptism, I could hardly concentrate in prayer. Whenever I closed my eyes to pray, all sorts of images flashed through my mind and distracted me. Doubts assailed me as I wondered if there really is such a thing as the Holy Spirit.

So many members were praying in tongues, but it seemed impossible for me

to receive the Holy Spirit. I wanted to be in the midst of the flock, but I felt like a lost sheep because I still did not have the Holy Spirit.

I started wondering whether my failure to receive the Holy Spirit was because I did not know the right way to pray or the right words to say. One day, a deacon said, "If you do not know how to pray, just say, 'Hallelujah' and your prayers will be answered."

I was happy and surprised to hear that. How did the deacon know that I had been looking for an answer to this question? From then on, I just said "Hallelujah" during my prayers, and I was no longer distracted by images in my mind.

After baptism, I resolved to change and avoid sin. I knew that receiving the Holy Spirit would help me, but I had not

Receiving the Holy Spirit changed my life. I used to be a very critical person, but I gained the strength to change this characteristic. I stopped gambling and attending gatherings during pagan holidays.

received it even after praying for it for more than one year prior to baptism.

Two days after my baptism, during the prayer at the Tuesday evening service, I suddenly began to speak in tongues. I was trying to say, "May God help me", but before I could finish saying the words, I couldn't control my tongue anymore.

Tears of joy filled my eyes as warmth flowed from my head to my shoulders. I was ecstatic. I knew I had received the Holy Spirit. It was a wonderful feeling that I had never experienced before. I was so happy that I could not sleep the entire night!

Despite my joy and excitement, I wasn't entirely confident that I had received the Holy Spirit. When my wife was not at home, I decided to try and see if I could still pray in tongues. When I knelt down and prayed, the tongues came easily. I needed no further proof that I had indeed received the Holy Spirit.

RENEWED AND STRENGTHENED

Receiving the Holy Spirit changed my life. I used to be a very critical person, but I gained the strength to change this characteristic. I used to gamble, sometimes staying up until midnight. I also attended dinners organized by idol-worshippers to commemorate the Chinese "Ghost Festival". However, with the help of the Holy Spirit, I stopped gambling and attending gatherings during pagan holidays.

I was amazed that I was able to cut myself off so abruptly and absolutely. I faced a lot of criticism from my friends due to my decisions. Losing some of these old friends saddened me, but God provided a few hundred new friends—my brothers and sisters in Christ.

In June 2004, I was diagnosed with throat cancer. The recommended treatment for me was a major eight-hour long operation, followed by thirty radiation therapy sessions. Surgery comprised removing my voice box and

opening a small hole in my throat for breathing.

I was shocked and worried after learning of my diagnosis and treatment. For a few nights after I learned the news, I lay wide awake thinking about this. During one sleepless night, it suddenly occurred to me that I should just pray to God and let nature take its course. After all, there was no alternative.

I prayed day and night and subsequently was able to sleep more peacefully. Moreover, I was able to accept what was happening to me. After all, good things must come to an end, and we have to live with "the days of darkness" (Eccl 11:8).

On the day of my surgery, I was worried and anxious. The idea of reciting Psalm 23 came to me, and even though it was something that I had only seen in a movie, I decided to try to calm myself this way. I repeated Psalm 23 over and over until I was anaesthetized.

When I woke up, I was delighted to find out that the surgery had gone well. I immediately prayed and thanked God for His mercy. I also had a wonderful feeling that my faith in God had grown much stronger. After two weeks of recovery, I was discharged from the hospital.

It was then time to start my radiation therapy. I thought it would be a breeze, but the doctor warned me that I might lose my appetite or develop a bad sore throat. Hearing this did not worry me because I knew that all I had to do was pray hard to God with all my heart.

As it turned out, I really had no problems taking my meals. My doctor was extremely surprised that I was fine and did not experience severe side effects from radiation. I thank God for hearing my prayers and allowing me to complete six weeks of radiation therapy with only some mild side effects.

After completing treatment, I rested at home for four months before I started attending church services again. I wept

during the first few prayers because I could no longer pray out loud in tongues. I also missed singing hymns with the rest of the members, which I had enjoyed very much. But still, I was very thankful for the mercy of God.

I resumed a normal and active life after completing my radiation therapy, and I only needed monthly check-ups. I continued to play table tennis at church every Thursday, and went out like any other healthy person. I spent the year 2005 much like I had before my cancer diagnosis, but with an increased awareness of God's love and mercy and a more mature faith.

STEADFAST THROUGH TRIALS

In January 2006, I was told that cancer cells had spread to my lungs. Although I was prepared for this possibility, I did not expect it to happen so quickly. For the next three months, the oncologist gave me oral chemotherapy medication. But because it was ineffective, he told me that I would have to undergo intravenous chemotherapy.

To make matters worse, a cataract was affecting my eyesight. So on May 8, 2006, I underwent eye surgery prior to commencing chemotherapy treatment. During the operation, a blood vessel in my eye burst, which caused a blood clot that affected my eyesight. The surgeon said it would take at least six months for my eye to recover completely.

Amazingly, when I went back to see him two weeks later, he told me that my eye was completely healed. He, a non-Christian, said, "Your God must have heard your prayers!"

My intravenous chemotherapy treatment started on May 15. Each session involved a blood test followed by one and a half hours of chemotherapy injection. I was scheduled to undergo eighteen chemotherapy sessions, but after the fifteenth session, the oncologist stopped the treatment because it was causing my legs to swell.

In November, the doctor told me that the cancer cells had grown and asked me to start on another chemotherapy cycle with a different drug. This time, I was

really sad and worried, thinking about the pain and additional side effects.

I could not sleep because I kept wondering whether I should proceed with the treatment. So I asked God to have mercy on me. What a preacher once said to me came to my mind, "Uncle, you don't have to worry, for God is in you. He will decide for you. You just do what you have to do."

Reassured by this thought, I decided to start on the new chemotherapy. However, the CT scan taken after three sessions of chemotherapy showed that the drug was ineffective, and so, the treatment was discontinued. The oncologist told me that there was nothing more that could be done. The only solution left was to pray for the cancer cells to spread slowly.

During this period of sickness, there were many times when I asked God why He put me through such sufferings. But

During this period of sickness, there were many times when I asked God why He put me through such sufferings.

But throughout all of this, I have learned to have more faith in God and to trust in Him, and it seems that my fears and pains have become increasingly easy to bear.

throughout all of this, I have learned to have more faith in God and to trust in Him, and it seems that my fears and pains have become increasingly easy to bear.

While I used to wonder if I was really good enough to go to heaven, I now often look forward to going to heaven. I have lived a good life, and I am ready to face death.

I would like to encourage those who are in sickness to have more faith in God

and let Him decide for you. Read 1 Peter 4:15-16 and you will find it easier to overcome the sadness and pain in you.

May God bless you and lead you to find the true God.

Although he was confined to bed in the last three months of his life, Uncle Tay experienced no pain and rested peacefully in the Lord on August 26, 2008. ★





Guided by God's Hand

Siah Chin Luan — Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia

A BUDDHIST UPBRINGING

I came from a big family with strong traditional Chinese Buddhist beliefs. As a child I had no exposure to Christianity. During Chinese New Year celebrations and other traditional festivals, the elders in my family were always busy preparing food and joss paper as offerings to our ancestors, and praying that these ancestors would bless us with peace and prosperity.

Worshipping in such a manner was therefore a habit that I acquired from a young age. I believed eating food that had been offered would bring peace; whether or not it had any basis in reality, this became a deeply ingrained concept in my life.

When I was ten, my maternal grandmother and my aunt became members of the Tian Dao religion. Grandma believed it was a faith that could

lead men to heaven and obtain the truth. Under their influence, we also gradually became followers of that faith.

After completing high school I enrolled in an English language class, where I met Brother Yong Choon Min, now my husband. Although we became friends, I did not know he was a Christian because he never talked about Christianity or his own beliefs. He was what could be described as a lost lamb.

During one of our conversations, when I mentioned that I was a member of the Tian Dao, he said, "Your type of faith is false." I was insulted and started to debate with him. He was unable to win me over, possibly because he had a shallow knowledge of the truth. We often quarreled because of our different faiths.

UNINTERESTED IN SERMONS

One day, Brother Yong saw an

advertisement for a college that offered a double degree twinning course in business administration and marketing. After two years of studies in Malaysia, we would complete our degrees with a final year overseas. We decided to register and continue our education.

Shortly after we started our program, Brother Yong and I were eating lunch when Brother Liao, who was enrolled in the same program, joined us and started to preach to us. It was during our conversation that we discovered that they both belonged to the True Jesus Church.

From that time on, Brother Liao often encouraged us to attend church services in order to find out more about the truth. Thank God, Brother Yong was brought back to the Lord's fold through his encouragement.

My first encounter with the True Jesus Church was in Kota Kinabalu. I was

shocked by the way the members prayed; it was loud and very extraordinary. I thought of leaving immediately, but out of respect for those who were praying I stayed at my seat.

However, other than my shock at the prayer I was rather indifferent to the whole experience. I didn't think that Christianity was special because I had been taught in Tian Dao that even though there were different religions, they all originated from the same place.

After that initial visit to church, Brother Yong brought me to service every Sabbath day. However, I only attended out of courtesy toward him, so I always hoped for the service to end quickly. I was not interested in Christianity, so it didn't matter that I couldn't understand what they preached.

Brother Liau would sometimes take the opportunity to explain the doctrines to me when we studied together. But I would try and make things difficult for him with many questions. I believed that every person could have his own faith because all religions persuade men to do good; the only difference is the method of worship.

MOVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

I attended services weekly at True Jesus Church to avoid arguments with Brother Yong, but I continued to teach children at a temple on Sundays. One Sunday, after the lessons were over, Brother Yong came to take me home. During the ride he said that he had to pick up his aunt and send her to the True Jesus Church in Penampang to attend the spiritual assembly being held there. He invited me to join them and encouraged me to pray for the Holy Spirit.

I decided that I would take the opportunity to pray and see if the God that I was praying to in this church was the God that I worshipped. I had been taught in Tian Dao that there was only one God, and through my conversations with Brother Liau my curiosity had grown as to who this Christian God was.

When the preacher invited those who wished to pray for the Holy Spirit to go to the front to pray, I stepped forward. While

I decided that I would take the opportunity to pray and see if the God that I was praying to here was the God that I worshipped.

I was praying, I suddenly felt that I was burdened with sins and I asked the Lord to forgive all my transgressions. I already believed in the last day and in eternal life through Tian Dao and I asked the Lord to save me. My body started to shake involuntarily and tears fell uncontrollably.

I was astonished. Why was I weeping when I was not sad? Why was my body shaking? I stopped praying and the tears and shaking stopped. When I resumed praying, tears again fell involuntarily and I felt a gentle and comforting warmth flow through my body.

While I was trying to understand what was going on, doubt started to creep into my mind. I heard a voice say, "What are you doing? Go back to your own religion." Once the idea entered my head the warm feeling left me. After a short time, the prayer ended. I returned to my seat and wept continuously.

Later, I was told that I had been moved by the Holy Spirit during the prayer, but I didn't really understand. When I returned home, I related the whole event in detail to my mother; both of us were astonished by what I had experienced. Neither of us knew the truth that was preached at True Jesus Church and we had never consciously sought to understand it.

Due to my mother's belief in Tian Dao, she asked me to stop going to church. However, I continued to go to church on Saturdays and the temple on Sundays.

TWO STRANGE DREAMS

Thanks to the grace of God, I started the final year of my university studies in London, along with Brother Yong and Brother Liau. Through God's love and mercy, I received loans that paid for my tuition and found a part-time job that paid for my living expenses.

I continued to attend services at the True Jesus Church in London with Brother

Yong and Brother Liau, and stopped going to the temple. Every week, we would stay at church over the weekend before returning to the university. One Saturday night in December, I had a dream.

In my dream I was in a temple, where there was a huge idol of Buddha. It was dim and filled with smoke, and I stood near the entrance. Suddenly, a mosquito flew past me and settled by the idol's ear, seemingly berating me for attending the True Jesus Church.

The Buddha's smiling face turned to fierce anger, its body grew bigger and bigger, and it came towards me so fast that it seemed to be flying. I could see it trying to grab me. As it got closer and was about to capture me, I clasped my hands and cried out, "Hallelujah! In the name of the Lord Jesus!"

I woke up even before I finished saying the rest of the sentence. I was so terrified of what I had just experienced in the dream that I prayed silently underneath the covers. However, when I woke up the next day I put the dream aside and treated it as only a nightmare.

A shadowy figure, with a long beard and dressed all in black, slowly floated out of the wall. Suddenly a voice sounded from the figure, "I am God."

A week later, London Church held a week-long evangelism training camp. One night during the camp, as I was sleeping in a room with a few other sisters, I had another dream.

In the dream, I saw a high wall. It was very dark and I could not see my fingers when I stretched out my hands. A shadowy figure, with a long beard and dressed all in black, slowly floated out of the wall. Suddenly a voice sounded from the figure, "I am God."

God? Does God look like that? Why is he dressed in black? I wanted to pray but I was unable to cry out "Hallelujah." I tried to wake up from the dream, but I couldn't. After a great struggle, I suddenly heard a loud bang, like two cars crashing

This dream and the one I had a week earlier were trying to make me stop going to church. Instead of having that effect on me, however, they showed me which religion I should follow.

into each other at high speed on the road outside the chapel. I was awakened by the noise and prayed for some time before falling asleep again.

The next morning, I asked the other sisters sharing the room with me whether they had heard the loud bang the previous night. They had not. If the loud noise I heard had been caused by a car accident, how could they not have heard it as well?

I then related my dream to Brother Yong. After I finished, he asked me whether I still had any idols or charms in my handbag. It was only then that I fully understood that this dream and the one I had a week earlier were trying to make me stop going to church. Instead of having that effect on me, however, they showed me which religion I should follow.

I related the two dreams to the deacons and gave them all of the charms and idols I had, which they destroyed in the name of Jesus.

RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

Seeing Brother Yong receive the Holy Spirit during the evangelism training camp spurred me to seriously seek after the Holy Spirit myself. That night, I prayed to God, "O Lord, You are the Lord of heaven and earth. Please let me once again experience the movement of the Holy Spirit. If it is Your will to give me the Holy Spirit, please let me feel Your existence again!"

I prayed even more fervently for God's forgiveness. Then I felt a warm current flowing from my head to the rest of my body, as if the Lord Jesus was gently comforting me. I immediately felt my stony heart dissolve and become a warm one, made of flesh.

For three consecutive days I prayed fervently to God in this manner. I also asked God to forgive my sins. During one prayer, I was suddenly reminded of my poor attitude towards my father and I felt deep remorse. If I could not respect my earthly father, how could I respect the heavenly Father?

I prayed even more fervently for God's forgiveness. Then I felt a warm current flowing from my head to the rest of my body, as if the Lord Jesus was gently comforting me. I immediately felt my stony heart dissolve and become a warm one, made of flesh. I started to speak in tongues, my body was vibrating and I knew I had received the Holy Spirit. The joy I felt was indescribable.

BAPTIZED INTO THE LORD

After receiving the Holy Spirit, I wanted to receive water baptism. But because my family members were followers of a different religion, I was afraid that they would object when I told them of my plans. On learning of my predicament, a brother urged me to pray to God about it. Thank the Lord, when I told my dad of my intention to be baptized, he did not object.

On February 8, 1998, ten people gathered at the baptismal site, where I was the only person to be baptized. The sky was cloudy and it was unbearably cold with icy winds blowing fiercely. We asked the preacher whether the baptism ought to be postponed but he answered, "Pray to God with faith."

When we opened our hymnbooks to sing, the clouds on the horizon parted and the sun shone upon us. We were very moved by the sight and knew that the Lord was truly with us. In my mind I kept thinking, I am so insignificant, yet God has allowed me to receive this

great salvation grace for which I am most unworthy. Tears fell as I felt the Lord's love touch my heart deeply.

I walked into the water, knelt, and bowed my head for the baptism. The moment I was immersed in the water, I felt as if all of my burdens were lifted.

I am so thankful to God for His wonderful guidance. Because of His love and mercy, He chose someone as insignificant as me to be His child. Throughout my life, even before I believed, God's gracious hand has been with me, guiding me all the way. His love has touched my heart so that I am able to deeply experience the true and living God working in my life.

How long, wide, high, and deep is the Lord's love? It is indeed without limits. He not only loves me, His love also covers my family. After my baptism my parents also came to believe and received baptism. To me, this is an added grace from the Lord.

May the grace and care of the Lord be with me throughout my life, so that I can continue in my heavenly journey, holding on to His hand. ★



www.mannamagazine.com

Looking for MANNA?

Be the first to get the latest issue online at www.mannamagazine.com

Other features:
Find past issues
Subscribe online

The screenshot shows the Manna magazine website. At the top, the word "MANNA" is displayed in a large, light blue font. Below it, a tagline reads: "The goal of Manna is to inspire believers to live an active faith through mutual encouragement and the study of biblical truths." There are two main sections: "CALL FOR ARTICLES" and "Manna Survey". The "Manna Survey" section has a button that says "Click here to begin." The "CALL FOR ARTICLES" section features a yellow box with the text: "Issue #57: Column: The Bible. Manna Nov. June 1, 2011. The Bible is the foundation of our faith, and members can continue to learn much from Scripture. How is it being preached and studied in the homes we live in? And further, how do we as believers study to be ready to testify? How have we as individuals and churches, Bible Study, and reading the Bible? How does personal Bible study differ from group Bible study, and what are some tools and resources that would 'help' facilitate our learning? If your submission, please include your name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number. Where you can find the current guidelines." To the right, there is a "LATEST ISSUE" section with a yellow pencil graphic. It features a thumbnail of the magazine cover titled "The Miracles of Jesus" and a short article preview. The preview text reads: "The Gospels contain many accounts of Jesus performing miracles. Whether healing the sick, casting out demons, or feeding five thousand with two loaves 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—ultimately, 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."

Call for Devotionals

"I will meditate on Your precepts, And contemplate Your ways." (Ps 119:15)

Most of us regularly read the Bible and ponder upon God's words and His works. However, not many of us may take time to actually pen down our thoughts. But if you do, you may actually be writing a devotional.

A devotional is a pithy article (300 to 350 words) inspired by biblical teachings. Has a verse recently caught your attention, giving you insight on God's love and a Christian's relationship with Him?

Write it down and share this spiritual nourishment!

If you wish to read recent and archived devotionals written by our church members, go to www.tjc.org and members.tjc.org.

To submit your devotional, please indicate "Devotional" in the subject line and send it to manna@tjc.org.



The Christ in the Book of Numbers— Part 1: The Nazirite

A Bible Study Series

based on *The Christ in the Book of Numbers* by Chen Sheng Quan

INTRODUCTION

The book of Numbers is generally recognized as one of the five books of Moses. It is named “Numbers” because it records two censuses of the Israelite males. However, the original Hebrew title means “in the wilderness”. The first half of the book records laws and statutes, while the second half recounts the life of the elect in the wilderness.

Although the people of Israel had seen God’s power when they crossed the Red Sea and were cared for by God, they easily believed in the bad report provided by the 10 spies. As a result of their disbelief and subsequent rebellion against God, none of those above 20 years could enter Canaan and all Israel had to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. Yet, God still cared for them and used different methods to preserve their lives, so that they could continue to walk according to His salvation plan.

While the Israelites’ wandering in the wilderness may seem to be a cruel torture from God, their experiences mirror, that is prefigure, the failures and victories in the spiritual journey of Christians today. As we study this part of Israel’s history (Ex 12:37-19:25; Num 16:1-25:18), we will discover countless prefigurations of forgiveness and salvation as well as proclamations of Christ’s salvation work.

In fact, the LORD had already hidden the Messiah, Jesus Christ, in the Pentateuch (= the five books of the law of Moses). For this reason Jesus said, “... if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” (Jn 5:46-47)

Although the whole Pentateuch contains many prefigurations of Christ, Numbers is outstanding in this regard. It contains a complete set of 10 prefigurations of Christ that can help believers to understand God’s plan and His superior wisdom. These prefigurations are comparable to pieces of a jigsaw puzzle which, when put together, reveal the complete true image of Christ.

In the first part of this Bible study series, we will look at the first prefiguration of Christ – The Nazirite.

PART 1: THE NAZIRITE CONSECRATED TO THE LORD

In the eyes of the world, the Israelites are a unique race. Although closely surrounded by neighboring nations, they are not accepted by other races. The primary difference between them and their neighbors is their belief. Up to this day, religious wars in the history of the Middle East originate from conflicts in religion. The Israelites believe in serving the one true God and worshipping the LORD because God had chosen them from amongst the nations and ordained His laws on Mount Sinai. God had explicitly made known that serving the LORD God wholeheartedly was the whole aim of the Law (cf. Lev 26:1-2). This is repeatedly expressed in the *Sefer Hamitzvot*¹. Therefore, other than their

¹Literally “Book of Commandments”. It is a work by the 12th century rabbi, philosopher and physician Maimonides that lists all the commandments of the Torah, with a brief description for each.

political system and social norms, religious institutions constitute a key characteristic of this nation.

The laws instituted on Mount Sinai 3,000 years ago had created a nation which manifests, "in every act, every word and deed, every drink and meal ..." the laws and statutes of God. Religious culture is a major asset of their culture.

In the beginning, the LORD commanded His servant Moses to appoint the sons of Aaron and the tribe of Levi to work in the tabernacle, attending to all matters pertaining to sacrifices of congregational worship and religious rituals. Thousands of years later, Israel emerged as a unique people who had built their nation upon a religious foundation. However, if service towards this one true God were limited to the priests and Levites, it would be far from the noble ideal that God intended to establish – "a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (cf. Ex 19:6, Lev 11:43-45, 1 Pet 2:9). As the office of priests and Levites is passed from one generation to the next, no other tribe can own this "ministerial right". This did not match the original principle of "ministry for all", so the order of the "Nazirite" was established. In other words, regardless of gender or tribe, anyone in Israel could choose to become a Nazirite, and thus be temporarily separated from the cares of this world. He could sanctify himself unto the LORD and serve the LORD wholeheartedly. This met the objective of "ministry for all", and was the most important reason why God instituted the order of the Nazirite. In this way, the order of the Nazirite was not only for one to be separated from secularity unto the LORD, but also to encourage every Israelite to be "consecrated and be presented to the LORD", becoming the ideal holy nation.

Since the LORD's ideal incorruptible nation was "a ministering nation", a people amongst the nations who belong to the LORD, a kingdom of priests and

a holy nation (cf. Ex 19:5-6), the order of the Nazirite was perfect as it was both feasible and meaningful.

Nazirites served God temporarily on a full-time basis. During the time of their consecration, they were not allowed to eat or drink anything produced from the grapevine, cut their hair or go near a dead body, even if one of their family members died (Numbers 6:1-21).

Famous Nazirites include the prophet Samuel in the ancient times, Samson during the time of Judges and John the Baptist in the New Testament. They had all been consecrated to God since birth. During the apostolic era, the Apostle Paul appeared to have taken a vow to consecrate himself to serve for a short period (cf. Acts 18:18, 21:23-24). However, our Lord Jesus Christ is the actual and everlasting Nazirite; He is the true Nazirite; the LORD's hidden truth. This hidden way shows the unfathomable wisdom and plan of God. Thus the Nazirite is the first manifestation of Christ in the Book of Numbers.

The Prefiguration of Christ

Taking the Nazirite vow to consecrate oneself to the LORD is an act for the elect to serve God wholeheartedly. We can thus understand how a Nazirite typifies Jesus Christ who, for our sake, was willing to be born into this world, preach the gospel of the heavenly kingdom and save humanity. Though He was in the world, He was, in nature, above this secular world.

The laws of the Nazirite – consecration, wholehearted service and separation from secularity - were manifested through Christ. Through His birth, growth, preaching, teaching, His miracles and finally His fragrant sacrifice on the cross, the veil between man and God was torn in two, fulfilling the work of salvation (cf. Matt 27:51). He entered this sinful world with the spirit of "[being] about My Father's business", never pursuing the

worldly pleasures of life and determined to be rid of the power of sin. He is the only perfect Nazirite, the model of an end-time Christian consecrated and separated to the LORD.

Consecrated to the LORD

As mentioned before, Nazirites voluntarily consecrated themselves to the LORD - bringing their body to subjection, controlling their desires and serving the LORD wholeheartedly. Being consecrated to the LORD, they were to strictly abide by the following ordinances during the period of consecration:

The laws of the Nazirite – consecration, wholehearted service and separation from secularity – were manifested through Christ.

1. Abstaining from Wine

Abstinence from wine and similar drinks signifies that those who are consecrated to the LORD should not enjoy secular pleasures.

The Israelites viewed wine, fermented drinks, vinegar, grape juice, fresh grapes, raisins and other fruit products as delicacies and tonics. These delicacies were an integral part of their daily life, with each having its specific use. Grape seeds, for example, were made into tonic water that not only enhanced appetite but also aided the digestion of meat. The fruits of the grapevine and liquors made from grapes were essential for the various annual festivals (cf. Deut 12:17-18, Ps 104:15). Having these listed as forbidden objects for Nazirites, would be deliberate deprivation of the pleasures of life and the right to celebrate for those who had taken the vow. During the period of their vow, Nazirites were to lead a monotonous and simple life devoid of pleasure.

Jesus Christ, the true and enduring Nazirite, lived His entire life separated from the pleasures and joys of this world. From the day He was born, up to the day He was crucified and breathed His

"Ministry for all" was the most important reason why God instituted the order of the Nazirite.

Therefore the secret to a growing faith is to be pure in heart and free from desires.

last, He led a simple life. He was so poor that He was without shelter, yet He did not succumb to temptation. He told His followers, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Lk 9:58). The Scripture also says, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). When tempted three times, He fought the good fight and was victorious (cf. Matt 4:1-11). He was diligent and frugal, with neither form nor comeliness; He forsook His honor and glory, dwelled amongst the poor and was despised. He did all these without any murmuring for humanity's sake.

In contrast, from time immemorial, the people of the world have been pursuing wealth. They use unscrupulous means with little care for morality, prepared even to turn friends and relatives into enemies. If as Christians, our focus in life is on wealth and power too, we are just like the people of the world. It is true that Christians will inevitably be defiled by the world. However, by abstaining from the pleasures of the world and leading a simple God-fearing life, we can maintain the status of a Nazirite and secure our spiritual lives. Therefore, the secret to a growing faith is to be pure in heart and free from desires. As such, Peter exhorted the believers of his time:

"Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." (1 Pet 4:1-2)

In these last days, we must be alert and reflective. Only then will Christ's suffering of poverty and sacrifice have significance for us. What is the use of a Christian who is a spiritual Nazirite but is unable to

control his secular desires to the point of being corrupted by them?

2. Letting the Hair of His Head Grow

The most distinctive sign of the Nazirites' separation unto the LORD is their hair. The Law specifically stated,

"All the days of the vow of his separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD, he shall be holy. Then he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow." (Num 6:5)

Since ancient times, adornment and colors in religious rites have frequently been used to differentiate denominations or sects; this may also include designated insignia to display reverence. In this respect, Nazirites were no exception, as can be seen from the ordinance concerning their hair adornment.

Trimming and grooming one's hair is one of life's enjoyments as it enhances external beauty, tidiness and comfort. An unkempt person not only looks strange but can also be downright ugly. So the LORD's demand for a vow from the Nazirites to let their hair grow seems to be counter-intuitive. In fact, this demand was not only to show that the Nazirites are different from others, but also to reflect the fact that they did not dress to please others through their external appearance. In this way, Nazirites could be easily identified as consecrated to the LORD.

Christ came into the world without beauty and He did not judge others by

The Nazirites' long hair serves as a reminder for today's believers not to conform to the world but to follow Jesus' example of humility and sincerity.

their outward appearance. As a result, the people did not honor Him and even despised Him. Isaiah, the great prophet, spoke about the appearance of the Messiah as early as 600 BC, prophesying:

"For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him." (Is 53:2-3)

For our sakes, Jesus willingly became poor and weak, bearing humiliation from the people of the world.

As we pursue for spiritual growth today, should we not come before God with reverence and sincerity and pray for things, which are pleasing to Him? As Christians we should not yearn for secularity, ostentation and external appearances. We must not conform to the trend of this world and seek after vain glory. Doing so is tantamount to building a house upon the sand, immolating oneself and corrupting one's spirituality (cf. Rom 12:1-2, Phil 2:3).

In the past 2000 years, secular church leaders have abandoned the poverty, humility and sincerity of Christ. Instead, they have blindly pursued external decoration and accumulation of power. Consequently, the truth was lost and the church was plunged into extreme misery in the ensuing chaos. Today, the spirit of Christ is completely absent and the way of truth and reverence has also become an unrealistic aspiration in many secular churches. Therefore, the Nazirites' long hair serves as a reminder for today's believers not to conform to the world but to follow Jesus' example of humility and sincerity.

3. Not Touching a Dead Body

Nazirites had to resolve to lead a life of holiness, free from the concerns of this world. They needed to purify themselves

As spiritual Nazirites, we must never allow our service to be defiled or interfered with. Instead, we should strive to be perfect as our high priest is perfect. Do not be satisfied with just having faith; serve wholeheartedly and proactively.

to avoid defilement, and could not go near a dead body, not even that of their own family members (cf. Num 6:6-8).

Parents and siblings are part of the immediate family and it is reasonable for us to be in sorrow when they pass away. Therefore it was not considered defilement by Israelite laws to conduct funerals.

However, God's expectations towards the Nazirites seem to be almost unreasonable, as they surpassed those towards the priest and even high priest. From the human perspective, such regulations appear to be quite heartless, perhaps even inhumane. They are also difficult to accept. However, God's laws need to be viewed from a spiritual perspective. To be consecrated to the LORD, which is what Nazirite means - denoted voluntary and special separation. Since the Nazirites had vowed to serve the LORD wholeheartedly, they were not to be troubled by matters of the world. As they had been consecrated to the LORD, even when family members such as parents or siblings passed away, they could not go near the corpse, lest they be defiled. Moreover, the Nazirites vowed to be separated, offering themselves to the Master. It was voluntary and done willingly so they needed to abide by this strict prohibition. They could not break the covenant. If they were to be defiled by the dead, all their earlier efforts would have been wasted and they would have to restart. Starting again meant that they would have to shave their head to consecrate themselves, sacrifice sin and burnt offerings and dedicate themselves

to the LORD anew for the period of their separation; the previous days would not count (cf. Num 6:9-12). Although this was a strict requirement, it holds great significance for Christians today – it shows the spirit of remaining undefiled by worldly matters.

In his life of service, a believer must reject the interference from worldly concerns even to the point of, when necessary, avoiding burdens of family relations and emotions. This enables him to serve God wholeheartedly, pursue absolute holiness in his life of faith and avoid making unintentional mistakes. Jesus was a life-long Nazirite who served God by leading a life of holiness. He is the perfect Nazirite in this world. As He taught His disciples:

"Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time – houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions – and in the age to come, eternal life." (Mk 10:29-30)

It is only logical that people are unwilling to give up parents, children, brothers, sisters, houses, fields, etc., as kinship, human relationships and physical objects are what we hold dear. However, as spiritual Nazirites, we must never allow our service to be defiled or interfered with. Instead, we should strive to be perfect as our high priest is perfect (cf. Matt 5:48). Do not be satisfied with just having faith; serve wholeheartedly and proactively - seek to manifest the Nazirite

How can our service be effective without God's forgiveness, acceptance and blessing of peace? Therefore the sin, burnt and peace offerings manifested the Nazirites' humility as well as their reverence and gratitude to the LORD.

spirit. If we allow ourselves to be defiled, all our earlier efforts will be wasted. The prophet warns, "...but he trusts in his own righteousness and commits iniquity, none of his righteous works shall be remembered" (cf. Ezek 33:13).

Therefore, a lesson for all Christians through the ages is to serve God wholeheartedly, lead a holy life and avoid any blunders in our life of faith.

Ordinances Concerning the Completion of Consecration

Apart from the ordinances concerning the separation unto the LORD when one took the Nazirite vow, there were also ordinances on the completion of consecration.

The original spirit of the Nazirite ordinance was to emphasize the manifestation of a "kingdom of priests" and a "ministering nation"; the focus was not on the length of separation or whether it was for life. When the period of consecration was over, Nazirites had to resume their normal secular life, doing their best when interacting with others, honoring parents and being loyal to their family. They were not supposed to live in long-term seclusion.

When the days of separation were fulfilled, Nazirites would first make three sacrifices, shave their head and burn the hair that was shaved off, after which they could eat and drink, and resume normal life (cf. Num 6:13-20).

Having said this, what do these ordinances teach us?

1. Offering Up Three Sacrifices

The ritual of resuming secular life began by making the sin offering, followed by the burnt offering, and ended with a peace offering (cf. Num 6:14-18).

Although Nazirites chose to be separated unto God and to serve Him wholeheartedly, their consecration was based on the LORD's forgiveness, acceptance and His blessing of peace. Thus, the ability to be consecrated to God is not by our own effort. How can

It is by grace, and not sacrifice, that we are able to serve. As God's workers, we should take heed not to be self-righteous, boastful or constantly recalling past glories – all honor and glory belong to God.

our service be effective without God's forgiveness, acceptance and blessing of peace? Therefore the sin, burnt and peace offerings manifested the Nazirites' humility as well as their reverence and gratitude to the LORD.

These three established offerings were made in order to remind latter generations that they are not separated unto God due to their good deeds and cultivation. The elect are able to serve because the precious blood of Jesus Christ grants us "remission of sin", "complete acceptance" and the "blessing of peace". Without the salvation of Christ, no one can be saved, regardless of how good he is, how excellent his moral standards, how pure his speech and actions or how great his sacrifice. Humanity is defiled and controlled by sin for which the final payment is death. Only through Christ the eternal sin offering can we be consecrated and once again be worthy of the grace to serve and be accepted by God. Therefore, there is nothing to boast about when we serve our Lord Jesus.

2. Shaving His Head at the Entrance of the Tent of Meeting

Following the completion of his consecration, the Nazirite had to shave his consecrated head at the door of the tent of meeting, and put his hair on the fire of the peace offering, following which he could drink wine (Num 6:18-20).

Since the Nazirite's hair was a sign of being separated unto the LORD, he may have naturally wanted to keep the locks of hair to remember the days of his consecration to the LORD; he may have even boasted of its glory. However, the LORD prohibits self-glorification and pride. Therefore, on the day of fulfillment, the Nazirite had to come to the door of the tabernacle of meeting and place his shorn hair on the fire of the peace offering. This is equivalent

to coming before God and man to completely and unreservedly cleanse off any sign that signifies separation unto the LORD. Firstly, this action prevented the Nazirite from boasting about his beautiful work of consecration to God. He had to be grateful for the opportunity to serve God. He could not boast. Secondly, this prevented the consecrated hair from being defiled by the world and completely preserved the sign of consecration.

Actually, it is very likely that the elect would have displayed pride and weakness in their service. They may have perceived their service as a form of self-satisfying sacrifice, proud that they had left their name in history, hoping to be honored and praised. This is a human weakness. We need to remember that we are merely useless servants. It is by God's mercy and acceptance that we are able to serve before Him; it is by grace, and not sacrifice, that we are able to serve. As God's workers, we should take heed not to be self-righteous, boastful or constantly recalling past glories (cf. 1 Sam 15:12) – all honor and glory belong to God.

Therefore, when the period of consecration was over, the Nazirite had to put the hair from his consecrated head on the fire. In this way he allowed everything to revert to normal, refrained from giving glory to himself and attributed all labor of sacrifice to God who sees in secret (cf. Matt 6:4-6).

3. Offering All

The law of separation mentions the phrase "whatever else his hand is able to

provide". What does this mean?

"This is the law of the Nazirite who vows to the LORD the offering for his separation, and besides that, whatever else his hand is able to provide; according to the vow which he takes, so he must do according to the law of his separation." (Num 6:21)

When the period of consecration was completed, the Nazirite was free to make whatever sacrifice he could afford in addition to the three required sacrifices. This additional sacrifice could also be a specific sacrifice made for another vow; he had to do according to the vow made and could not break the vow.

The service of a Nazirite portrays a Christian's life of service. A person who belongs to God no longer belongs to himself but is of Christ; he has been redeemed and offered to God. As Paul encourages the church in Rome, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom 12:1).

Today, we, who have been baptized into Christ, belong to Jesus Christ. We are called to be (original text: offered up) apostles and, in turn, spiritual Nazirites; there is nothing that belongs to us. We belong to God entirely and should thus offer a complete sacrifice, instead of restricting ourselves to certain types of offerings.

God has allowed us to possess our own riches and He has blessed us with abundant grace, so that we do not lack anything in our lives. Thus, in the pursuit of holiness and service, we should follow the Scriptures' instruction to "... serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul"

This is the true meaning behind "whatever else his hand is able to provide" – we must not limit ourselves to only certain types of service.

and, to "... love the LORD your God" (cf. Deut 10:12-13, Matt 22:37-40). This is the true meaning behind "whatever else his hand is able to provide" – we must not limit ourselves to only certain types of service.

4. Receiving Blessing

"And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them, 'The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.' So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them. (Num 6:22-27)

The passage above was the priestly blessing for the Israelites. No matter

whether this blessing was directly related to the service of the Nazirite, whether it was for the realization of the "ministering nation" or just following the usual offering of sacrifices, it was always a wonderful grace to receive the blessing from the high priest. After performing the sacrificial rituals, Aaron would lift his hands towards the people and bless them. It is said that this then became a practice of Israelite worship (cf. Lev 9:22). A ministering nation will be a blessed nation.

The Nazirites' consecration to God demonstrates four principles of living:

- consecration,
- worship of the true God,
- zealous service,
- and receipt of God's blessings.

Hence, the Nazirite's prefiguration of Christ shows that every believer should seek to be "separated from secularity and consecrated to God" as well as to have the Nazirite's "noble spirit of wholehearted servitude". ★

Nazirite:

A person who sanctifies himself to serve God temporarily as a full-timer.

God instituted the Nazirite order to achieve "ministry for all".

- Not allowed to eat or drink anything made from grapes
- Not allowed to cut their hair
- Not allowed to touch a dead body
- When time of consecration is up, the Nazirite has to make 3 sacrifices, cut his hair and burn the hair on the fire of the peace offering.
- Famous Nazirites: Samson, Samuel (from birth), Paul (short-term)

Jesus = the true & everlasting Nazirite = symbol of consecration, whole-hearted service to God & separation from worldly matters and pleasures

Music



All the Sons of God Shouted for Joy

K.C. Tsai—Toronto, Canada

ENCOUNTERS WITH MUSIC

The orange-colored seats on the Air India plane brightened up the whole cabin. The spacious legroom and the personal TV screen in front of each seat washed away the former chaotic make-do scene in the cabin.

Air India was no longer that makeshift airline which I had taken 12 years ago, where, when you asked for a diet coke, you would instantly get a pack of milk to substitute what the attendant could not find in the cart.

Only one thing had remained unchanged—the Indian music, with its short but repeated syllables that floated around in the cabin. The music went on and on until its tune kept reverberating in my head, following me into the arrival hall of Heathrow airport.

End of May, I took Air India to London, UK, the city where time zeros. Once again, I realized how large this city is - the Tube journey from the airport to London Church took more than one hour - and yet, I had only traveled half the way across the city. The city seemed to be like the brethren from China whom I met later at London Church—foreign but seemingly familiar.

Unexpectedly, more than a hundred mainland Chinese brethren had come to London since my last visit. Being foreigners in this country, they usually work on Saturdays to make a living, leaving no luxury for them to enjoy the Sabbath rest. For this reason, they gather every other Sunday evening from 9 pm

to 3 am in the morning to sing hymns and have services. On one occasion, after dinner, a youth from London Church showed me a youtube video. It sounded like a pop concert or a TV show, but then I realized that it was actually a presentation by a True Jesus Church choir. The showmanship of the soloist, with deliberate slurred diction and occasional outbursts of near screaming echoed through the large dining hall. Unprepared to hear a hymn presentation in such a showbiz- style, I was prompted to think of the music that flows through the Bible

THE ORIGIN OF MUSIC

Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:4-7)

When God laid the foundations of the earth, the morning stars sang and the sons of God (angels) shouted for joy. Yet, music first appeared in human history in a completely different context.

Genesis 4 mentions that Cain went out from the presence of God and lived in the land of Nod on the east of Eden, after he had killed his brother Abel. Later on, from Cain's lineage, Jubal became the father and inventor of instruments (Gen 4:21). So, music and instruments initially had nothing to do with praising

or worshipping God. Music exclusively served the purpose of entertainment and relaxation among men.

MUSIC TO PRAISE GOD

When Jacob's wife Leah gave birth to Judah, she said, "Now I will praise the LORD." Therefore she called his name Judah (literally "praise") (Gen 29:35). Only then did music regain its original purpose, which is to praise God just as the angels did at the time when God laid the foundations of the earth.

More than 400 years later, when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and through the Red Sea, God plunged the tenacious Egyptian army and their horsemen and chariots into the sea. Following that, the children of Israel joyfully celebrated their deliverance. They joined Moses in an enthusiastic song of praise to God for His glory and power. Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel in her hand while all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam said,
"Sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has



Our focus is on thanking and praising God with a pure and sincere heart. Instead of using worldly methods to draw people to God, our reverent singing and praise will please the Lord and thereby attract those who have a heart to seek Him.

thrown into the sea!" (Ex 15:21).

The Israelites sang and danced for God, for the LORD Himself had become their strength and song.

The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him. (Ex 15:2)

When the chosen people eventually came to the east side of the River Jordan, God told Moses to command them not to offer sacrifices at any place of their own choosing once they entered the promised land. Instead God Himself would choose a dwelling place for His name. The people were to come to this place to 'learn' to worship and offer sacrifices during festivals, three times a year. God had sovereign control over the selection of the place for worship, where He would put His name (Deut 12).

After the Israelites had conquered most of the cities in Canaan under Joshua's direction, the tent of meeting was set up in Shiloh.

Now the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of meeting there. And the land was subdued before them. (Joshua 18:1)

DEVIATING FROM AND RETURNING TO GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS

But who would have thought that things would take a different direction? The 400-year period of the judges in Canaan ended with this remark:

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes. (Judges 21:25)

All this time, God was with Israel and wanted to be their king to guide them.

Yet His people were without a king in their hearts. Unable to see God's presence, they conducted their lives according to their own liking and concepts. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Although they continued to go to Shiloh during the three festivals to sing, dance and be merry, these actions were no longer directed towards God (Judg 21:19-25). Instead, they were merely giving full reign to their emotions, entertaining themselves and others.

It was not until the time of David that music was given a whole new dimension and purpose. David played the harp with a heart of quiet servitude. Moreover, he used his harp music to drive out the distressing spirit from Saul. Thus, he elevated the purpose of music to a higher level—it was used to please God and to ask for power from Him. Through his music, which was completely for God and directed towards God, David found favor in the eyes of the LORD and also received strength.

After David's ascension to the throne, he longed to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. However, his first attempt failed, as he did not follow the Law, which prescribed that the ark had to be ministered to by the priests and carried by Levites. Due to his negligence and Uzza's ignorance, God struck Uzza to death. Through this sobering incident, David realized that man should not superimpose his own ideals or creativity on the principles of God in service and worship. God has given man clear instructions on how to worship and serve Him. What man needs to do is to learn to follow these instructions.

The second time, David had learned his lesson and used the proper way to usher the ark into Jerusalem. He not only commanded the priests and Levites to purify themselves before carrying the ark,

Subscribe now! At www.tjc.org

but also appointed singers to sing praises before the procession. These singers, who were chosen from among the Levites, were to welcome the ark into the city of David with loud and joyful praises.

FOCUS ON PURITY AND SINCERITY

After they had set the ark of God in the tabernacle, David also appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of God, to commemorate, to thank, and to praise God (1 Chr 16:4). He then separated these Levites into 24 divisions. They cast lots for their duty, the small as well as the great, the teacher with the student, so that they could be instructed to make music to God, and take turns to praise Him (1 Chr 25:1-31). By then the first choirs were established.

The Levites were consecrated to God, replacing Israel's firstborn males to serve God and to fulfill the sacred duties. They were separate from the rest of the people and sanctified. In a solemn manner, they sang praises to God.

Today, our choirs should do likewise. We are a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), the spiritual Levites. As such, we need to be careful not to sing hymns to entertain or feed our emotions, but to thank and praise God. Most importantly, our hearts must be consecrated as we make music to Him. If our focus is on thanking and praising God with a pure and sincere heart, our own ideas will naturally take a backseat. Instead of using worldly methods to draw people to God, our reverent singing and praise will please the Lord and thereby attract those who have a heart to seek Him. ... Consequently, the Holy Spirit will touch people's inmost selves and guide them into God's presence.

Speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our heart to the Lord. (Eph 5:19)

As the sons of God, let us gaze at God's creation and salvation as well as His unceasing mercy. Let us make Him our song ... then, indeed, we will shout for joy! ★

True Jesus Church

the true vine

<http://www.tjc.org>

May 2011

Cleansing the Ten Lepers

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. [Read more...](#)



Christian Living



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

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. [Read more..](#)

Our Stories



God Revealed His Church to Me

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. [Read more...](#)

Q & A



On the Meaning of Footwashing

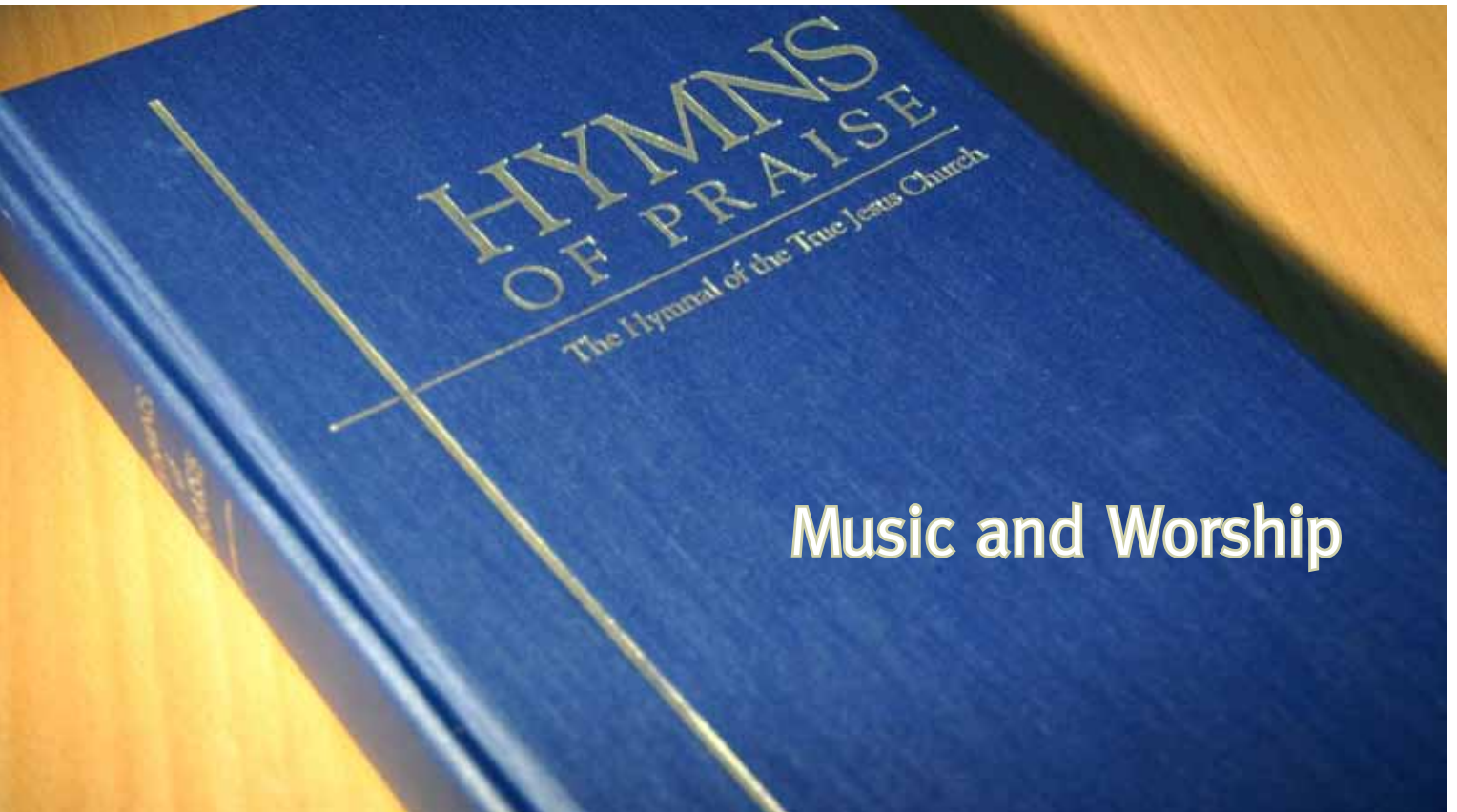
What does it really mean to wash one another's feet? [Read more...](#)

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

We sent you this e-newsletter because either you requested information from us or you subscribed to receive updates at our web site. We are a non-profit organization and DO NOT make your name or email address available to anyone else. We are strongly against spamming and would never sell or distribute your information to third parties. Read more about our [Privacy Policy](#). [Unsubscribe](#) this newsletter.

Copyright © True Jesus Church | All rights reserved | [Terms & Conditions](#)

If you would like to receive a monthly supply of spiritual encouragement, please subscribe to our e-newsletter, The True Vine! You will find helpful articles and testimonies to uplift your faith, and this electronic version is both easily accessible and available for your convenience.



Music and Worship

The Bible tells us to “[speak] to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph 5:19).

Today, hymn singing forms an integral part of our congregational worship where we gather to sing before and during worship services. Yet, hymn singing should be extended beyond formal worship sessions, and be incorporated into our Christian life of faith. It should not be a formality but an expression of sincere praise to God. Just as Paul encourages us, we should edify one another and “make music in our heart to the Lord” in our journey of faith. This article examines the role of music in different aspects of our life of faith.

PRAISING GOD THROUGH MUSIC

Very often, during congregational hymn singing, we are exhorted to sing and praise God with one voice. Yet this can only be achieved if we understand the

reason for our praise to God. Let us study some examples from the Bible.

First, we praise God for His almighty works and His salvation grace.

As early as the time of Moses, music was used to allow a group of people to praise God in one accord. After God delivered the Israelites across the Red Sea, Moses and the children of Israel sang a song to the Lord, praising Him for His almighty works (Ex 15:1-21).

The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him. (Ex 15:2)

As we congregate for worship services, we have to remember the amazing works of God in our lives and reflect on His salvation grace for us. When we do so, our hearts will overflow with songs for God and, from the depth of our hearts, we will sing in one accord to praise and glorify the Lord.

Second, regular congregation service

aside, there will also be special significant events for us to praise God with one voice. It could be a church dedication, a spiritual convocation or a church anniversary.

For example, when the ark was moved to Jerusalem, King David was so jubilant that he led the people of Israel in a mass celebration of praise. It was an occasion to celebrate and rejoice over God's special providence and to remind the people of God's wonderful grace – it was a special, significant event. The Bible describes that “David and all the house of Israel played music before the LORD on all kinds of instruments of fir wood, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on sistrums, and on cymbals” (2 Sam 6:5).

Third, hymn singing can promote fellowship with Christ and with our brethren.

The Lord Jesus and His disciples used music to praise God together. The Bible records that it was only after Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn that they went

to the Mount of Olives (Mt 26:26-30, 14:22-26). Followers of Christ continued this practice; Silas and Paul prayed and sang hymns to God in prison (Acts 16:25).

The Lord Jesus promised that when two or three are gathered in His name, He will be in their midst (Mt 18:20). When we gather as a congregation to sing, we are having fellowship with our brethren, as well as with our Lord Jesus Christ. Such fellowship goes beyond the usual worship service, and can happen at any juncture of our Christian journey of faith.

It is easy to sing hymns of praise when we are happy. However, to be able to sing to the Lord together with our brethren in times of trial creates a kind of fellowship and encouragement that mere words cannot express. In the midst of trials and tribulations, the music and words of hymns can remind us of God's faithfulness. They will comfort and reassure us, and lift up our spirits once again.

A few years ago, a member in Singapore passed away. His family, who were not believers, requested the church to conduct the funeral service. As this funeral service coincided with the church's spiritual convocation, only a handful of believers were able to attend. On the way to the funeral service, these believers were worried that there would not be enough people singing hymns during the service. When the funeral service began, the hymn "God Understands" was chosen. As our believers sang the hymn, they felt as if God had sent His choir to sing along with them. In the end, the hymn touched, comforted and encouraged not only the bereaved family but also the brethren who helped with the funeral service. They

When we sing hymns, do we pay attention to the teachings of God that are outlined in the lyrics? Do we commit them to heart, so that they can encourage us in times of need?

experienced how God personally had fellowship with them as they sang.

Indeed, music can be a powerful tool that draws us closer to God and helps us to feel His presence. All it takes is to sing to the Lord with sincerity of heart and with one accord!

TEACHING THE WORD OF GOD THROUGH MUSIC

Teaching through oral and written instructions is commonly accepted as effective means to pass on knowledge. However, we see that songs or music can also be an effective way of teaching. Paul tells us that psalms, hymns and spiritual songs can be used in teaching and admonishing one another.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Col 3:16)

When Moses was about to hand over his leadership to Joshua, the LORD commanded Moses to write a song and "teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel" (Deut 31:19). This song, recorded in Deuteronomy 32, is an account of God's deliverance, commandments and divine qualities. When Moses taught the people how to sing this song, he urged them to take the word of God to heart: "for it is not a futile thing for you, because it is your life, and by this word you shall prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess" (Deut 32:47).

David and Solomon also understood the power of music in teaching God's word. Thus, they wrote many psalms to teach others how to praise and worship God.

Today, we may not have access to the original music that the psalms were set to, but many teachings in Psalms and other portions of the Bible have been set to music within our hymn books.

When we sing hymns, do we pay attention to the teachings of God that are outlined in the lyrics? Do we commit them to heart, so that they can encourage us in times of need? As sermon speakers or religious education teachers, do we make an effort to choose hymns that reinforce our message so that the word of God can be emphasized through our singing?

Some churches also conduct hymn services where the congregation worships primarily through hymn singing, accompanied by words of encouragement and Bible reading by a service leader. The service leader guides the congregation to understand spiritual teachings and Christian truths through the hymns that are sung, and the congregation can be encouraged to reflect and praise God in one accord.

We can then take this one step further, and apply the Biblical teachings found in the hymns we sing to our daily life of faith. We will then lead a life that is pleasing to God.

When we look into David's life and read his psalms, we notice that he lived according to the words that he set to music. This makes the message that he is trying to convey through his psalms extremely powerful.

THE SPIRITUAL ELEMENT IN MUSIC

I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding. (1 Cor 14:15)

Music can be a powerful tool that draws us closer to God and helps us to feel His presence. All it takes is to sing to the Lord with sincerity of heart.

THEME

In the Old Testament, music worship often involved a spiritual element. When Saul joined a group of prophets in prophesying, they used a stringed instrument, a tambourine, a flute and a harp (1 Sam 10:5). Later when David became king, he and the captains of the army set apart musicians to prophesy with harps, stringed instruments and cymbals (1 Chr 25:1).

Moreover, music was not only used in prophesying, but also in spiritual warfare. Whenever an evil spirit came to King Saul, young David "would take a harp and play it with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him" (1 Sam 16:23).

When King Jehoshaphat was attacked by the kings of Moab and Ammon, the LORD sent word through the prophet and told him, "Do not be afraid nor dismayed because of this great multitude, for the battle is not yours, but God's" (2 Chr 20:15). As a result, King Jehoshaphat appointed singers "who should praise the beauty of holiness" to go before the army. As they began to sing and to praise the LORD, God defeated their enemies (2 Chr 20:21-24).

Today, spiritual warfare can still be fought with music, as an example at Irvine church in the United States demonstrated. As the ministers were casting out demons, an elder was inspired to ask the congregation to support them not only with prayer but also by singing the hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers". Indeed, this helped to subdue the evil spirit.

Many members and observers have also testified to the spiritual power of music when they were suffering from life-threatening illnesses or when they were in great pain. When members visited them in the hospital and sang hymns, they would immediately feel God's peace.

Therefore, we should not underestimate the spiritual power in music. Music for God is very different from that of the

world because God is in the picture.

SERVICE TO THE LORD THROUGH MUSIC

Indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the LORD, saying:

"For He is good, For His mercy endures forever," that the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God. (2 Chr 5:13-14)

If we examine the Old Testament worship, we find that choirs and musicians played a very important role in the entire nation's worship of God. King David, for example, appointed skilled full-time singers for the tabernacle from among the Levites to sing before God day and night (1 Chr 6:31-48; 15:16-19; 25:7; 9:33-34).

In fact, the church choir can be likened to the army of the Lord, going forth to fight a spiritual battle, especially during evangelistic services. Therefore, if we are choir members or if we lead the congregation to praise God in our everyday worship, we need to cultivate ourselves spiritually, so that we can serve God as worthy vessels and lead by example.

When the ark was brought into the tabernacle that David had constructed, David appointed 4000 Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to celebrate, thank and praise the LORD (1 Chr 16:1-43, 23:1-6). Later, when the ark was finally moved into the holy temple, the trumpeters and singers made themselves heard with one voice to praise and glorify God (2 Chr 5:13).

2 Chronicles 29:27-28 records that King Hezekiah gave order to sacrifice burnt offerings. While the whole assembly worshipped, the singers sang and the trumpets sounded until the burnt offering was completed.

Ever since the time of King David, singers and musicians were considered part of Israel's worship, even in the service of purification. They sang songs of praise and hymns of thanksgiving (Neh 12: 45-46).

All these examples show one thing: trained and dedicated musicians and singers were an important part of worshipping God. They ministered on special occasions, such as the dedication of the temple and the sacrifice of burnt offerings. They also served God every day, showing Israel how to praise the Lord and leading them to praise Him in one accord.

Just as the musicians did in the past, today, we can use our musical skills to serve in the church, participating in special events, such as spiritual convocations or gospel outreach programs. Also, in our regular church services, home fellowships, religious education classes or even during family worship time, musicians or choir members can lead and accompany the believers in the worship of God.

In fact, the church choir can be likened to the army of the Lord, going forth to fight a spiritual battle, especially during evangelistic services. The choir members therefore need to be aware of their role in this spiritual warfare, and to prepare and cleanse themselves for spiritual battle.

Likewise, if we lead the congregation to praise God in our everyday worship, we need to cultivate ourselves spiritually, so that we can serve God as worthy vessels and lead by example.

PERSONAL DEVOTION THROUGH MUSIC

In the preceding sections, we have touched on singing and making music as a community of faith. However, music

also forms a very important part of a Christian's personal devotional time.

Many of us will naturally hum or sing when we are happy. In fact, elder James tells us to sing psalms, whenever we are cheerful (James 5:13). David understood this very well, as can be seen in many of the psalms of praises that he wrote. But David also sang when he was in deep sorrow.

*Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him
For the help of His countenance. (Psalm
42:5)*

Whenever David sang, he would be reminded of the great hope that is found in God. Subsequently his sadness would turn into renewed hope and praise.

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in
all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one
another in psalms and hymns and spiritual
songs, singing with grace in your hearts to
the Lord. (Col 3:16)*

Hymns and music can also help us to express our thankfulness to God, our confessions and our joy as we read the Bible, pray and reflect on our day. In fact, the NIV version of the above verse translates grace as gratitude.

In addition, hymn lyrics can help us to remember God's words.

We should be careful about our choice of music. For whatever we regularly listen to can dwell in our hearts, leaving no room for the words of God.

Apart from the active use of music in our personal devotion to God, we should also consider our choice of music in relation to our faith.

When we are at church, we normally sing from our hymn books. At home, however, besides enjoying hymns and other Christian songs, we may also listen to music on the radio, download songs off the Internet and keep up to date with the latest popular songs. Sometimes, we may know the lyrics of popular songs better than the lyrics of hymns.

However, the lyrics of many modern day songs leave a lot to be desired. Not only are some of the themes questionable, the lyrics are even worse. Sometimes we sing along without even thinking about what we sing.

Elder James warns us that the tongue is very hard to tame:

*"With it we bless our God and Father, and
with it we curse men, who have been made
in the similitude of God" (Jas 3:9).*

Today, are we praising God with hymns at church, and yet, singing curses and

other undesirable lyrics as we indulge ourselves in the latest pop song?

Certainly, not all popular songs are bad. However, there are quite a number of pop, rock & roll and hip hop songs that promote violence, sexual immorality, drug abuse, occult practices and even anti-Christ sentiments. Very often, the lyrics are secondary to the 'good' feeling that these songs evoke. We may like the pounding rhythm and beats, coupled with the showmanship of the musicians. More often than not, we do not even realize that these songs carry insidious messages that will enter deeper and deeper into our mind each time we listen to these songs.

A very good example is the early 1970s' popular song 'Imagine' by John Lennon. Its melody and the ideals it expresses are very beautiful as the song asks the listeners to 'imagine' a better world. However, take a look at how the song starts ...

*Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky ...*

In this song, John Lennon paints an unrealistic picture of life in the listeners. He imagines a world without heaven, without hell and without religion. He sees a world without countries, borders and without wars. Although such a dream may seem admirable to many people, his dream is about abandoning God and His word! If we sing or listen to such music very often, our hearts will be 'corrupted'.

For this reason, we should be careful about our choice of music. For whatever we regularly listen to can dwell in our hearts, leaving no room for the words of God.



Our use of music in worshipping God will be a deep expression of our love and reverence for God that will glorify God and edify both others and ourselves.

CONCLUSION

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.

(Eph 5:15-21)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Col 3:16)

Both passages above encourage us to make psalms, hymns and spiritual songs an important part of our lives. We have seen the importance of music in Christian worship – both for the congregation and the individual. However, in order to truly please God with our music and singing, there are a few things we should note:

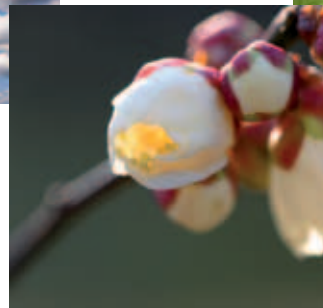
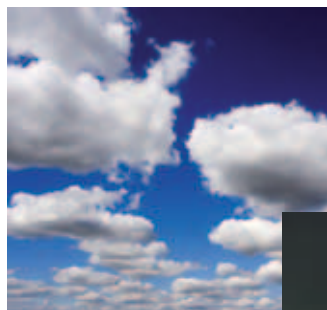
- The word of God must be deeply rooted in us.
- Be wise and understand what the will of the Lord is.
- Be filled with the Holy Spirit.
- Have a heart of thanksgiving.
- Be submissive to one another in the fear of God.

If we take all these things to heart, our use of music in worshipping God will never be a formality. Instead, it will be a deep expression of our love and reverence for God that will glorify God and edify both others and ourselves. ★

PHOTOGRAPHERS WANTED!

Love photography?

Use your skills for God & contribute your shots to MANNA today!



For submission information please contact us at manna@tjc.org

We are looking for photos with the following themes: Peace, joy, love, comfort, hope, family, faith, nature, scenery.



Musical Lessons in Faith, Service and Worship

Ascents

Since childhood, music has played a significant part in my life, in particular, at home and in church. From young, I was nurtured to understand that music is an integral part of praising God. In addition, I was encouraged to participate actively in our church's music ministry.

By recalling my experiences in worshipping and serving through music, I hope to share how music can help us to open up our hearts to praise God, and what we should be careful about in our service to God.

NURTURED FROM CHILDHOOD

I fondly recall learning the jolly children hymns in Religious Education classes, especially the ones with accompanying body actions. Although I didn't fully understand the lyrics at that time, I knew they were about praising God and sang as loudly as I could in the classroom and whenever we presented in front of the congregation.

Singing these hymns nurtured my love

for music. I was also greatly influenced by my parents who constantly sang at home, at work and even while traveling to and from church in the car. If they weren't singing, I would be listening to church hymns on the cassette tape or CD player.

In addition, my siblings and I were given the opportunity to learn to play the piano. It was my older sister who was the first amongst us to receive piano lessons from a neighbor. Secretly, I also wanted to learn as I watched my sister plunk about on the piano in the corner of our living room. After a few weeks of pleading, my parents allowed me to have my first piano lesson when I was six years old.

KICKING UNHEALTHY MUSIC HABITS

My interest in piano music naturally led to listening to classical music and opera; the latter started when I found to my astonishment CDs of The Three Tenors—Pavarotti, Domingo and Carreras—amongst my father's music collections. Later, I began listening to Christian and

gospel music due to its religious content.

Living in a media-orientated society, I was surrounded by different mainstream music genres—Rhythm and Blues (R&B), popular (pop), and dance music. I constantly heard it at school, the shopping mall, even at home on the radio and television. The more I listened to these types of music, the more I became accustomed to it.

Very quickly, this habit became an addiction and affected the way I lived my life. Conversations revolved around pop stars and their songs, pocket money was spent on teen music magazines, and radio and television music channels were always switched on at home. I knew all the lyrics by heart; the catchy melodies and the rhythmic bass beat gave me an instant lift. Furthermore, gossiping about the singers and bands helped me to identify with popular culture; socially, I felt knowing about the current music trends was a way to be accepted by my school friends so they wouldn't perceive me as a boring goody-goody Christian.

Every decision we make ultimately affects our faith negatively or positively. In my case, enjoyment of secular music gradually turned into an addiction that slowly interfered with my daily life. I also became spiritually insensitive and compromised my faith for fleeting moments of entertainment.

Deep down, I knew this addiction was unhealthy for my faith. It wasn't until one Student Spiritual Convocation that I received a wake-up call. The preacher taught me to stop and think about the music I was listening to. To my shock, all the mainstream secular songs I had memorized had lyrics filled with lustful thoughts, encouragement of physical intimacy, rationalizations for committing crimes, and other unchristian principles. I was enjoying, singing and listening to music that God does not take pleasure in.

With determination and reliance on God's strength, I went cold turkey on listening to pop, dance and R&B music. When my sisters switched on the radio or the television, I changed the channel when the music or video came on. I threw away the magazines and cassette tapes that I had bought. At school, I was worried about not fitting in with my friends but I knew I had to face my fears sooner rather than later. It turned out that my friends still accepted me for who I was, although I was not listening to "their" music anymore.

Through this experience, I found a renewed hope in knowing that, with God's help and personal motivation, I was able to overcome my addiction to popular music. Purging this music from my life was necessary so that I could gain control of my emotions and personal habits, and focus on my faith and studies.

Every decision we make ultimately affects our faith negatively or positively. In my case, enjoyment of secular music gradually turned into an addiction that slowly interfered with my daily life. I was blind to the messages behind these songs and their lyrics. I also became spiritually insensitive and compromised my faith for fleeting moments of entertainment. It is

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

PARTICIPATING IN THE MUSIC MINISTRY

The adults in my local church looked highly on music and actively encouraged the youths to take up playing musical instruments as a hobby. They hoped that those talented in playing the piano could later fill the shoes of the self-taught adults of their generation to play during services and special events. I often heard the adults telling us to emulate the two faithful servants who invested their master's talents to reap back twofold of its original worth (cf. Mt 25).



I grew up watching talented older youths, mainly sisters, take up the divine work in piano accompaniment, hymnal leading, and choir teaching in church. This spurred my aspirations to work for

God in the music group, and to use my piano playing talent to serve Him, just as David and the musicians did in the house of the LORD (1 Chr 6; 13). So at home, I learned how to play all the hymns of our church hymn book with the hope that one day, I could serve God by playing the piano.

When I was thirteen, I mentioned my secret hope of playing for church services to a sister. The sister simply replied, "Just ask." However, shyness prevented me from approaching the timetable organizer. Thank God, four months later, I was pleasantly surprised to see my name scheduled to play for a Sabbath service on the monthly church timetable.

Unwittingly, this became the start of my huge learning curve on how to serve God in the right manner and with a good spiritual mentality. After playing a few times for services, my confidence gradually grew, but so did my pride. Technically, I was a better-skilled piano player than my peers as I could play the hymns with improvisation and dynamics very well.

Playing the piano during services became a performance rather than a way to serve God and to lead the congregation in worship.

This struggle with pride was constant,

even though I knew it was wrong for me to think I was better than others. It did not help that my pride was fed by the praises from other people. So I kept reminding myself that I was there to serve God, not to puff up my ego, because He is the One who gave me this gift. Before I played the piano for service, I would quietly say a silent prayer, asking God to help me do this work to glorify His name and edify the church. The more I did so, the more I was able to subdue my pride.

Playing the piano for services evolved into teaching the church youth choir. With some singing lessons as my foundation and a strong fervor, I believed that I was an ideal candidate to take up this role. Soon after I had started this work, I realized that it was not as simple as I had initially thought. In the process, I met with tough challenges when working with the youths, as well as my personal struggle with pride.

I unconsciously adopted a strict military-like teaching method which was not well-received by the choir members. As the weeks passed, I saw how unmotivated the choir members became and that progress was slow. But instead of questioning my own limited abilities, I questioned the choir's capabilities. My stubborn nature told me to stick to my method instead of looking at myself as the real problem and to empathize with the choir members.

Furthermore, my pride took on a different form to test my faith again. The pride that surfaced stemmed from having a position of authority and influence. Apart from being a choir teacher, I also served in the local church music committee. Although I kept reminding myself that all glory should be given to God, I mistook this pride as a kind of motivating zeal for serving God because I was leading a group of people to learn new hymns. Unfortunately, that small smudge of pride snowballed and became a stumbling block to me: I could not accept advice, which resulted in damaged friendships with my church friends and co-workers.

When I look back at this period of my life, it saddens me that although I may have had the physical capabilities, I did not have the right attitude or mentality to serve God and lead His children to serve God through choir. But thank God for His unfailing patience and mercy on me. Although I did not implement the advice received, my conscience always remembered what was said, even if the truth did hurt. After much inward assessment and remorseful repentance to God, I slowly changed my stubborn attitude and tried to mend the relationships I had unintentionally broken.

Serving God requires us, as His vessels, to use our strengths to do His work and will. Yet inadvertently, our weaknesses may obstruct the good work that we want to do. The only way to solve this problem is to work harder on our spiritual cultivation.

Solely focusing on the task at hand but ignoring our own spiritual well-being is comparable to creating a spiritual minefield for ourselves. Learning how to submit ourselves to the will of God and the instructions of the church, and to humble ourselves is something that we all need to undergo to refine our spirit of servitude and selflessness. The greater our responsibilities are in the church, the more we must humble and lessen ourselves.

Furthermore, serving God in any capacity means that we must bring those under our care to worship and find green pastures in God in a fitting manner. We are not to divide and conquer in the house of God; we are shepherds who must lead His flock to find the goodness in serving God too.

WORSHIP THROUGH SINGING

Over the following years, I taught other youth choirs during theological seminars

and student convocations. Thank God, I had learned from my mistakes and my teaching skills improved and developed into a gentler approach. But one mystery that had eluded me was how to sing with my heart to God.

When I attended the Canadian National Youth Theological Seminar (CNYTS) in Toronto in 2008, the choir teacher said that we should not sing aimlessly and with an empty heart; rather, we should sing with reverence to God and in complete awe and respect for Him. Without fearing God and spiritually cultivating our hearts whilst we sing, our singing is no longer a way to worship God, but is just like singing any other song.

This message left a deep impact on me and still resonates in my mind whenever I teach choir and sing hymns during services. I finally understood the meaning of being touched by the lyrics of a hymn and the reason why tears are shed during a meaningful hymn in Holy Communion. Singing with our hearts points to our mentality when we sing a hymn; we should not only see the lyrics on a page, but should go beyond the physical and enter into a spiritual mindset to feel God's love that is vividly painted by the meaningful lyrics and to blend our voices with the emotions expressed through the words. The Holy Spirit helps us to enter into this true spiritual worship by pouring the love of God into our hearts (Rom 5:5), so that we become spiritually sensitive to the message of the hymn.

Since then, I encourage the choir members to delve into a spiritual mindset so that they can worship God through singing by thought-sharing and word-painting. The atmosphere completely changes when the choir hears and connects to someone's personal experience and then to the message of the hymn. Everyone is spiritually admonished

Serving God requires us, as His vessels, to use our strengths to do His work and will. Yet inadvertently, our weaknesses may obstruct the good work that we want to do. The only way to solve this problem is to work harder on our spiritual cultivation.

Singing with our hearts points to our mentality when we sing a hymn; we should not only see the lyrics on a page, but should go beyond the physical and enter into a spiritual mindset to feel God's love. The Holy Spirit helps us to enter into this true spiritual worship by pouring the love of God into our hearts.

and sings with grace in their hearts to Jesus, just as Paul encouraged us to do: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col 3:16).

Hymns also have a healing and relaxing effect on our souls; I often hear how brethren who are in ill health or in emotional troubles gain peace when they listen to church hymns. Somehow, God can reach us through that one word, phrase, verse or chorus, whether we were seeking for His comfort or peace, or during an unexpected moment. Again, this is done by the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth and comfort.

Worshipping God through singing goes beyond the physical projection and volume of our voice; it extends inward to a reverent place that the Holy Spirit leads us into as we sing the words before our eyes or from our hearts. It's a spiritual vulnerability that is shielded and gently molded by God's love and comfort, which allows us to understand the heart of God.

EXPERIENCING THE AFRICAN SINGING

Having a musical background and having heard wonderful testimonies about the members in Africa, I had always hoped to go on a church missionary trip to assist in the divine work, and to see and hear the joyful singing that the African people were renowned for. Thank God, I was able to witness firsthand how the members in Kenya worship God through singing in 2010.

The Kenyan members sing local Christian hymns in Swahili and in the ethnic language of Luo during services. The lyrics consist of simple messages and words that are

repeated several times within the same song. From past experience, I knew that Africans remember important messages through constant repetition. In this way, they are able to remember the lyrics and the melody; more importantly, it allows them to learn about God and appreciate the messages in the hymns.

During hymnal sessions, a medley of local hymns flows seamlessly from one song to the next, with each hymn having a singing leader or the church choir to guide the rest of the congregation. Occasionally, I was able to sing along with them when I recognized a hymn from the True Jesus Church's hymn book.

In addition to their enthusiastic singing, they joyfully clapped and swayed their bodies whilst singing hymns in harmony during worship. This reminds me of the many psalms and songs in the Bible where the lyricists encourage God's people to praise His name with songs and dance:

Praise the LORD! Sing to the LORD a new song, And His praise in the assembly of saints. Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise His name with the dance; Let them sing praises to Him with the timbrel and harp. For the LORD takes pleasure in His people; He will beautify the humble with salvation.
(Ps 149:1-4)

What I've learnt from our African brethren is that singing praises to God can be an enjoyable form of worship involving body, soul and spirit, where inner joy is expressed physically. For this reason, it is important to prepare our hearts and spirits to praise God before we come for services, and during the silent prayer before the hymnal session.

CONCLUSION

From biblical examples such as Moses, Deborah, David, Paul and Silas, we can see that music is an expressive and creative form of worship. Like them, we too can utilize music to express our gratitude and praises to God. Hymns may be pleasant to the ears, but what is sweeter is the spiritual taste of God's grace that we receive through them. Singing for God is not about singing the loudest or melodiously; it's about opening your heart to praise and revere God by letting the Holy Spirit work in you.

In terms of serving God with music, I have learned from past mistakes to be careful not to boast of my skills and talents whilst I do church work; rather, I must humbly do my utmost to use music to guide other brethren and listeners to seek and draw closer to God. I cannot let my weaknesses—in particular pride—control my actions and mind, and cloud God's will. To tackle this, I couple my church work with constant spiritual cultivation through praying, Bible reading and regularly attending church services. It allows me to take a further step towards being "a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Tim 2:21).

Let us hope that we can sing with the angels in heaven and praise God before His throne when the day of judgment comes.

May all glory and praise be to Jesus Christ, our Savior. ★



Jesus, Saviour, Pilot Me

Adapted from a sermon by Peter Shee—Singapore

*Jesus, Saviour, pilot me
Over life's tempestuous sea;
Unknown waves before me roll,
Hiding rock and treach'rous shoal;
Chart and compass came from Thee:
Jesus, Saviour, pilot me.¹*

Life is comparable to sailing. We are sailing a bitter sea. Bitter, because there are many difficulties and dangers along our way. We may hit an iceberg; we may meet with a storm or we may get lost due to lack of orientation. For this reason we need Jesus to safely pilot us to shore.

Sailing is very dangerous. Titanic was thought to be safe and unsinkable. Some people thought that even God could not sink that ship. But the very first time Titanic set sail, it collided with an iceberg and sank.

Whether our ship of life will be able to reach the shore safely is still a question mark.

PATHS IN THE SEA

Did you know that there are paths in

the sea? It is true that we cannot see these paths, but they are there, for God personally created them.

*You have made [man] to have dominion over
the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,
All sheep and oxen--
Even the beasts of the field,
The birds of the air,
And the fish of the sea
That pass through the paths of the seas.
(Ps 8:6-8)*

The sea of our life also contains a path for us to walk on, which God has already prepared long ago. Although we may not see this path, we can find it very quickly. If we are able to find Jesus, we will find our direction and path in life. He is the path that leads to eternal life. He is the path that leads us to the shore. For the Lord Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

Since God created the paths in the sea, it is only logical that "chart and compass came from [Him]", and that He is able to

pilot us over life's tempestuous sea.

If we walk in the path that God has prepared for us, He will help us to avoid the "hiding rock and treach'rous shoal", i.e. things that can kill us spiritually; for only God knows the paths in the sea.

Paul understood this very well:

*And the Lord will deliver me from every
evil work and preserve me for His heavenly
kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever.
Amen! (2 Tim 4:18)*

JESUS' TOOLS OF NAVIGATION

So what does it mean to be piloted by Jesus?

It means that we have to follow the Lord Jesus in the paths of righteousness.

*He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.*

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death, I will fear no evil;*

For You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

(Ps 23:3-4)

*So what does it mean to be piloted by Jesus?
It means that we have to follow the Lord Jesus in the paths of righteousness
that leads through the valley of the shadow of death.*

The path of righteousness is not an easy one. If we are determined to lead godly lives, we need to go through tribulations and sufferings. In fact, the path of righteousness leads through the valley of the shadow of death. Yet, Jesus uses His rod and staff to comfort and pilot us.

A shepherd uses his rod and staff to keep his flock together, so that none of his sheep will get lost. If a sheep is about to go astray, he will use his rod or staff to hook its neck or even hit and poke it. In this way the sheep will feel pain and subsequently, return to the flock. The shepherd's intention is not to hurt the sheep but to bring it back, for the real pain lies in going astray.

Today, Jesus guides us in like manner. But why do we have to suffer?

Psalms tells us that suffering benefits us, for “[b]efore I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word” (Psalm 119:67).

So the Lord's rod and staff are His tools of navigation to ensure that we do not go astray.

*As a mother stills her child,
Thou canst hush the ocean wild;
Boist'rous waves obey Thy will
When Thou say'st to them,
“Be still”;
Wondrous Sov'reign of the sea,
Jesus, Saviour, pilot me.¹*

TRUSTING IN JESUS TO CALM OUR HEARTS

Sometimes while boisterous waves are raging outside, there may be even more frightening waves inside our hearts. However, if we have faith, we will not be afraid.

Look at Peter—by faith he was able to walk on the sea. But when he focused on the boisterous waves, he was afraid and began to sink.

Without faith, even a small matter will be a big wave to us. When the Israelites

were just one footstep away from the promised land, they did not have enough faith to enter it. Due to their fear, the giants in the land of Canaan appeared much bigger than they were—a small wave that looked like a big tsunami.

For this reason, we need to rely on Jesus' words. If we do so, we will be like a child, resting very assuredly in its mother's bosom.

*Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul,
Like a weaned child with his mother;
Like a weaned child is my soul within me.
O Israel, hope in the LORD
From this time forth and forever.
(Ps 131:2-3)*

We also need to believe that Jesus is the Lord, God Almighty – the Wondrous Sov'reign of the sea. Only He is able to give us true peace and to calm our hearts, no matter what winds and waves, external dangers or internal sorrows may arise.

*Leaning on Jesus' breast, we will peacefully pass through
those fearful wild waves of life until we safely reach the beautiful shore.*

*When at last I near the shore,
And the fearful breakers roar
'Twixt me and the peaceful rest,
Then, while leaning on Thy breast,
May I hear Thee say to me,
“Fear not, I will pilot thee.”¹*

GOD'S LOVE WILL LEAD US TO THE SHORE

A certain song says that life is beautiful only, if there is a shore.

In fact, life is like a bitter sea, which we are sailing. For this reason we need to look towards the shore—the beautiful shore of our heavenly home.

Only then will we have a goal in life. Only then will life be beautiful.

Although fearful breakers will roar and

try to separate us from the peaceful shore that we are trying to reach, we need not fear. Instead, we can assuredly lean on Jesus.

*Who is this coming up from the wilderness,
Leaning upon her beloved? (Song 8:5)*

It is the Shulamite, Solomon's beloved wife, representing the church – you and me. She is named after Solomon himself, whose name means peace.

Solomon named the Shulamite after himself because he loved her as his own body. This act prefigures the love between Christ and us, His church.

Since God's love for us is so deep, nothing can separate us from His love.

*Many waters cannot quench love,
Nor can the floods drown it. (Song 8:7)*

So if we lean on Jesus' breast, we will not only find peace but we will also enjoy His love and protection. Leaning on His breast, we will peacefully pass through those fearful wild waves of life until we safely reach the beautiful shore.

For this reason, the Shulamite says, “Then I became in his eyes as one who found peace” (Song 8:10).

NO MORE SEA

*Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
for the first heaven and the first earth had
passed away. Also there was no more sea.
(Rev 21:1)*

In the end, when the new heaven and new earth appears, the sea will be no more, i.e. things that used to trouble us will cease to exist. So, leaning on Jesus' breast, we will be able to cross the boisterous sea ... until the sea is no more and we remain in the arms of Jesus forever. ★

¹ Hymns of Praise, True Jesus Church 1993, No. 69



Having been away from the workforce for more than thirteen years, I am now back working full time. In today's recessive economy, it is a miracle that I have been able to start a new career. It was a big change for my family and me, but God's grace made all the transitions possible.

On the surface, God has helped me start a new career. But on a much deeper level, God has taught me how sweet it is to trust Him.

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

BECOMING A SCHOOL TEACHER

I never considered teaching as a career. God gave me the opportunity to be a RE (religious education) teacher after I moved to Chicago shortly after marriage. Teaching RE was great training for my spirituality and servitude. I also realized I enjoyed being in the classroom with

children.

Nevertheless, my true calling came when my husband's business began to run into trouble. I wanted to help bring in income for the family, but I was absent from the workforce for more than ten years. After much consideration and research, I knew I needed to own a new job skill to secure an income source if my husband's business was to fail completely.

Teaching came into my mind. At this point in life, I wanted a career that was rewarding. Becoming a teacher would also be good role modeling for my children. I decided to pray to God to see if He would bless my wishful thinking.

Obtaining teaching certification is a two-year investment of time and money, and I simply had no confidence that my husband's business would last that long. Even if it did, finding a teaching position afterwards was a big uncertainty. I also hoped to teach somewhere close to home so I could be home early to care for my children after school.

The first step towards eligibility for

enrollment in a teacher program in Illinois is to pass the state's Basic Skills test, which is a grueling five-hour test of reading, writing, and math. I heard that many people had to retake the test numerous times before they passed.

In prayer, I asked God to allow me to pass the test in one sitting. Then I would know I made the right decision to go into teaching. If I failed the test on my first try, then I would know it wasn't meant to be.

Taking the Basic Skills test and the subsequent tests until I was finally certified were all nerve-wracking experiences, and I felt under-prepared each time. Nevertheless, I passed all the tests without retaking. With the success of each test, it was clear that God was guiding me.

Some might think I was just lucky. I knew when I looked at the questions that they were not easy. But I was able to remain calm throughout the exhausting tests and came to educated guesses after re-reading the questions. That was how I knew God was helping me.



THE LONG ROAD TO THE JOB PREPARED FOR ME

Two years of school and student teaching was intense but rewarding. I finished my certification program in spring 2008. At that time, my biggest concern was that my children would have both parents working long hours. So I signed up for substitute teaching at first.

For two years, I had a vague idea that my husband's business was struggling in the worsening economy. But amazingly, it survived another year. We continued to pray that God would preserve his business. I had to believe that if God had guided us so far, He would sustain us until I found a real job.

Substitute teaching turned out to be an important learning experience. Teaching in different grade levels and classrooms allowed me to build up the experience I desperately needed.

I learned that even a substitute teacher needed to network. Without good relationships with the school secretaries and classroom teachers, I wouldn't receive many assignments. Without a steady stream of assignments, the income for a substitute teacher was small and without any benefits.

I also learned to be versatile and flexible. Since I was new to the district, I often didn't receive assignments until late at night or early in the morning. Hence, I always said a prayer before I left for work, asking God to give me enough wisdom to know how to deal with a new group of kids and curriculum.

I also prayed for the safety of my children because I needed to leave the house much earlier than them. That year was a good training for the two of them to get ready for school on their own.

At that time, my son was in sixth grade, so he was old enough to be responsible at home without parents for an hour or two. I'd leave notes for them, and we made a big poster listing all their responsibilities. Thank God, they were never late for the school bus or forgot to bring their lunch boxes.

By the winter of 2008, I realized it

was only a matter of time before my husband's business would close. The notion of losing our sole source of income made me realize the urgency of finding a permanent position.

There was no more time to bargain with God. I needed to find a real job. Teaching was no longer a fallback plan—it was about survival. I couldn't be choosy anymore.

DOORS OPENED

I changed my prayers. I told God that I would go anywhere He wanted me to go. I would even move to another state if necessary.

Around the end of January 2009, the coldest time in Illinois, the hiring season began at the school districts. I was determined to be more proactive and assertive in applying for jobs.

I continued to polish up the essay application questions and I applied to many districts. After many prayers, I finally worked up the courage to approach the new principal at the school where I student taught to ask for an interview opportunity.

I went to teacher job fairs, where I stood in line competing with many new college graduates for a five-minute interview with each district. I needed to show God how much I wanted to work now.

In February, I finally got my first formal screening interview with the district where I substituted. Maybe it was the talk I had with the principal, maybe it was the sub experience. Whatever it was, I was just elated about this opportunity.

I tried my best during the interview but my nerves got the better of me. Two weeks later, I received the rejection letter. I was completely dejected. I had no more connections left. The last door had closed on me.

When I shared the news with the resident pastor in Chicago, he encouraged me, saying, "God has already found you the job, you just have to wait for it. Don't give up!"

I told myself that I was allowed to mope for two days, and then I needed to move on. The failed experience was another learning experience. Next time, I

*When all human doors are closed,
God's door of grace is opened.*

would do better.

From then on, I just kept praying. I held onto Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Indeed, when all human doors are closed, God's door of grace is opened.

In March, I was referred to a district thirty-five minutes away to be a one-on-one aide to a student who was recently adopted from China.

Since it was just a temporary job until the end of the school year, there were no benefits and the pay was even less than a substitute teacher's daily rate. I took the job anyway. I considered it more training from God, and I could put this new experience on my resume.

The Chinese student turned out to be extremely challenging. She had never been in school before and had physical and psychological disabilities. Every day was a new challenge with her. But the principal appreciated my effort and offered to look out for job opportunities for me. I felt much encouraged.

Shortly after I started as an aide, I received news that a district nearby opened a position in a middle school for a Chinese teacher. Although my certificate was for elementary education and I did not have a middle school endorsement, I updated my resume and submitted the application anyway.

With this opening, a brand new door was opened for me. My certificate would allow me to teach in middle schools if I completed just two more courses equivalent to six credit hours. Most of all, the pool of applicants would imaginably be much smaller than for regular teachers at the elementary level.

GOD CARRIED ME THROUGH

In April, I received the call for an interview.

I know I will survive as long as I continue to trust in His guidance and ask Him to bestow wisdom and strength on me.

I was extremely nervous and asked friends at church to pray for me.

That was the most challenging interview I ever experienced. There was first a forty-five minute writing test with three essay questions, then an interview that was videotaped.

As it happened, the staff was friendly. The principal was warm and laughed at all the jokes I made. During our conversation I was able to refer to my student teaching experience and the work with the Chinese student.

I received the invitation for the second interview the following week. I was told it was down to the final three candidates. This time, I met with the chair of the foreign language department, two parents, and the principal. Two days later, I received a call asking me to teach a mini-lesson to a group of sixth graders.

God carried me through the whole process, and the school offered me the job within two days. The day I went to sign the contract with the district in May, I listened to the praise song "I Saw the Light" in my car. I finally saw the light at the end of the long tunnel. The waiting was over, and I sang along:

*"I saw the light I saw the light
No more darkness, no more night
Now I'm so happy, no sorrow in sight
Praise the Lord, I saw the light."*

For me, it was evident that God created the job position for me.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. (Jer 29:11)

As I yielded to the possibility of moving anywhere God wanted me to go, He placed me right back in a school that

was a mere fifteen-minute's drive away. I had secured the contract even before I registered for the courses for middle school endorsement. God had given me this assurance even before I was completely certified.

In the summer, I took the state content area test in Mandarin to qualify for teaching Chinese and completed the courses. Everything was ready before school started in fall.

But that is not all. God's grace is so much deeper and wider. Looking back, my husband's business continued to run in spite of the market downturn. It held on just long enough for me to complete my teacher's training.

When the business closed, my husband was able to receive unemployment payments until I started working. By the time I received my first paycheck in September, his unemployment had expired. God does provide!

LOOKING FORWARD

The first year of teaching is tough. I often feel exhausted but I remind myself to do my best to glorify God's name.

Thank God that my husband is now home with the kids, as I often stay late after school. I don't have to worry about them missing the school bus in the morning, or that no one feeds them after school.

I know I will survive as long as I continue to trust in His guidance and ask Him to bestow wisdom and strength on me.

And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD... (Jer 29:13, 14)

May all glory be onto His name! ★



With Every Break Comes Another Wave

Andy Wang—Irvine, California, USA



On the Sundays that I am free, I like to take my board out to the Pacific Ocean for an enjoyable surf session. Although I am still a beginner, it is an invigorating activity that allows me to get away from the hustle and bustle of life.

During one of my first surf sessions, I remember walking toward the ocean and watching the waves come in from the horizon toward the shore. The waves looked small, but they were actually taller than they appeared to be. Putting my board onto the water beside me, I trudged through the waves until the water level went from knee-deep to waist-deep. What was out there? I did not know just yet. I slowly entered into unknown waters with an innate curiosity as to what the great big blue would offer.

When I look back on the past few years of my life, I can say that my journey through business school was a lot like learning to surf. Although challenging, I was able to rise and stand triumphantly with God at my side.

PLUNGING IN

Since my undergraduate years, it had been a goal of mine to pursue a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree in order to expand my skill set and achieve a management position in the future. In April 2007, I began my part-time MBA program at the University of California, Irvine. At the time, I was also working full-time as an electrical engineer at a major aerospace company in southern California.

I was fortunate enough to work for an employer that offered a full tuition reimbursement program, as long as I continued to work while I studied. I was not sure what I was getting myself into, but it did not seem like it was going to be so bad. Little did I know that I was in for a daunting challenge.

For the first few quarters, I had to adapt to being in school again. A typical day started at 5:35 am and was followed by working for eight hours, rushing from work to school to slave away on school

assignments, and then attending class from 7 to 10 pm. In addition, I had to attend group meetings, work on case studies, rehearse for group presentations, etc. It was the toughest schedule I had ever dealt with, and I felt spread thin.

Things started to further accelerate at the end of 2007 when I was elected as the General Affairs council member at my local church. My basic duties consisted of logistical tasks such as performing inventory checks, purchasing and replenishing supplies, and arranging lodging and transportation for out-of-town guests.

However, being a board member was quite involved. Other than the jobs listed above, I also had to listen to church members' problems and provide advice. At this point, it felt like I was paddling toward deeper waters as things became increasingly hectic.

WIPING OUT

I was juggling three responsibilities: full-

time employee, church council member, and part-time business school student. Every day, stress constantly followed me wherever I went, whether at work, school, or church. At times, it felt like a powerful wave had hit me from behind, causing me to fall off my board and to swallow an enormous gulp of salt water.

One time, I had several exams and case studies due the same week a local church retreat had to be organized. I identified greatly with the stress that the prophet Elijah felt as he fled from Jezebel, who wanted to kill him (1 Kgs 19). Time always seemed like it was running out. I also experienced fear and was weak in faith, just like Peter, when he walked on water (Mt 14:28-31).

I started to think that the onslaught of stress from three different directions was negatively affecting my faith. I knew something was wrong since I did not receive any physical or spiritual rest on Sabbath. I would go to church and my head would ache. This was a clear sign that I needed to re-evaluate my life and take action.

FINDING MY BALANCE

In May 2008, during one of the church council meetings, I expressed my difficulty in executing general affairs tasks due to my stress levels and lack of time. Although the council had not previously sensed my anxiety, everyone was very understanding of my struggles. They advised me to delegate more tasks to other church members, which reminded me to take the initiative in withstanding oncoming waves until I could find my balance.

I also talked to my church friends, family, and pastors, which helped a lot as a channel for my emotions. Confiding in those of the same faith is important because they can understand and provide comfort and edification for church- and faith-related issues.

After that council meeting, I began the healing process. I discovered that I had taken a lot of matters into my own hands,

I began to work more on my spiritual cultivation because I realized that it was the root of my problems. How could I be a proper worker for God if my faith was not set on a solid foundation?

thinking it would be easier than involving multiple parties. However, this actually created more stress because there was so much that I had to do.

Aside from delegating, I began to work more on my spiritual cultivation because I realized that it was the root of my problems. How could I be a proper worker for God if my faith was not set on a solid foundation? Previously, I felt quite far from God, which was very disturbing to me. Even though I tried to function normally and show my cheery self on the outside, I was feeling spiritually down and miserable inside. I decided that I needed to turn to God's word and spirit to build myself up and quench my anxieties. I knew that what I truly hungered for was His bread to fill me so that I could gain comfort and strength

I instituted a weekly lunch fast on Sabbath to lay all my cares and burdens before the Lord. My immediate prayer requests were for God's guidance in all of my endeavors and that I could carry out my tasks without feeling stressed. I also asked the Lord to help me improve my time and priority management.

At the same time, I became serious about developing a better habit of regular Bible reading so I would always be infused with the word of God. I found new meaning in my favorite verse: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope" (Jer 29:11).

Over the following few months, as I overcame each wave another would come, and it felt like a never-ending battle; but I started to find hope in God after making changes to my life. As Psalm 89:9 states, "You rule the raging of the sea;

When its waves rise, You still them." In only about a month's time, I could sense that God was helping me.

STANDING UP

Surfing looks easy, but to be able to stand up on your board, you must be able to find your center of gravity amidst relentlessly pounding waves. You must paddle until the wave is just about to break and until the speed of your board matches the speed of the wave. If you succeed, you are able to push up from your board and stand.

Through uplifting sermons, inspirational words from friends, and satisfying prayers, I realized that God had chosen me to be His worker for a reason and that this was a test to see if I could fully rely on Him. I was only a vessel of God and no better than anyone else. But the work that I was doing, however small it was, had its purpose in God's great plan.

After I started putting the needs of the congregation before my own, I began to feel joy in doing church work, which I had not previously experienced. For example, when I was tasked with exploring better lighting solutions for the chapel, I didn't see it as a tedious task, but rather something that would allow the congregation to enjoy Sabbath in a comfortable and aesthetic setting.

I also began to realize that if I put God first, He would provide. In Matthew 6:33 it says, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." I found this to be very true. Even though work and school assignments were important priorities, I proactively set aside time for God by consistently reading the Bible and attending more weeknight services. Once the Sabbath rolled around, I set aside that day for God and did not worry

Once the Sabbath rolled around, I set aside that day for God and did not worry about school or work, because I realized that God is the only one to dictate what happens in the end, despite all our human efforts.

about school or work, because I realized that God is the only one to dictate what happens in the end, despite all our human efforts. As time went by, I started noticing better grades in business school and overall smoothness.

I thank God that my job at the time was manageable, which gave me time to take care of church matters throughout the day. God also provided me with a focused, composed mind throughout the rest of my business program. Time management became more natural to me, and because my planner was always filled with things I had to do that day, I was able to keep focused. I was able to finish assignments weeks ahead of time and obtain decent grades. I even had time to pursue my hobbies.

LOOKING BACK

In retrospect, I really thank God that He guided me through that difficult period and helped me to understand the powerful role of spiritual cultivation. When I was younger, my religious education teachers' universal tag statement for spiritual growth would be, "Pray and read the Bible." It seemed so proverbial to me because we may often say it as lip service. However, the statement is not to be underestimated. Relying on God's word and spirit can build up whatever we are lacking in life. Food and drink can satisfy our weak flesh temporarily, but what can really fill the void within us is spiritual nourishment. In fact this was the one element that I had been missing all this time and what would help me solve my problems. When I improved in the area of spiritual cultivation, I felt that the word of God was always in my heart to comfort me

even when I felt down and that the Holy Spirit would reassure me to keep my faith. I received a type of spiritual peace and joy that one cannot find in the world.

When I ponder upon my life, I can say that the events in my life act very much like the pattern of waves. If I am victorious during one stage and am afforded a break, another wave will come, bringing the next host of trials. However, like a seasoned surfer after countless surf sessions at the beach, a Christian who continually cultivates his spirituality and relies on God will no longer be daunted by the waves.

I can now understand that God had His plan for me in the waves that I faced. God granted me this valuable experience so that I could learn to face the waves of life with calmness, composure, and joy. By harnessing His life-changing word and spirit, we can truly ride the waves of life and be triumphant. ★



Top to Bottom and Bottom to Top

Samuel Kuo—Canoga Park, California, USA



In the summer of 2006, I visited the Vatican Museums. About an hour in, as I was walking through all the magnificent rooms and admiring the fine art, I was pleasantly surprised to step into the Raphael Rooms. When I beheld Raphael's *The School of Athens*, chills literally went through my body. It was magnificent. Not only was the fresco beautiful, there was a mental satisfaction in recognizing it and remembering how my Art History professor expounded on the Renaissance ideals encompassed within. Soon my eyes gravitated to the two central figures located near the vanishing point: Plato was the one pointing up; Aristotle was the one pointing below.

According to popular theory, Raphael specifically painted these giants of western philosophy with these gestures to symbolize and distinguish their contrasting ideologies. In many of his works, Plato essentially questioned reality as perceived by the human senses. To him, since the senses filter reality, what is sensed is merely opinion. Therefore,

ultimate truth can only be obtained if some being beyond our senses could tell us what truth really is. This is why he is pointing up. Plato's approach to reality can be simplified as Top to Bottom.

Aristotle, on the other hand, is often known as the father of science. Although he was Plato's student, he thought that Plato had it completely wrong—that our knowledge of reality can only be defined by what is perceived by the senses and what is experienced. To him, empirical knowledge is the only knowledge that can be trusted, and as a result, constructs what we know as truth. This is why he is pointing down. His down-to-earth approach is the basis of and philosophy behind all modern science. Aristotle's approach to reality can be simplified as Bottom to Top.

*Believe so that you can experience;
experience so that you can believe.*

Though idealism (Plato) and empiricism (Aristotle) are contradictory, they constitute the two ways in which humans reason. The first—Top to Bottom—is the basis for all deductive reasoning. This is where we use a guiding principle and draw conclusions from it. The second—Bottom to Top—is the basis for all inductive reasoning: meaning, from experimentation, we construct a higher principle and form a more general conclusion.

Both approaches have their flaws. In deductive reasoning, if the first principle is assumed incorrectly, then the resulting conclusion will also likely be false. Likewise, in inductive reasoning, the result is intrinsically a guess at the truth based on observed cases. Since it is impossible to test infinite cases or account for all possible variables, the conclusion may not actually be true, though it is one with high probability.

We see, then, that one approach cannot give us a complete picture of

REFLECTIONS

truth—we are best served if we think in both directions: top to bottom, and bottom to top. One cannot and should not be emphasized over the other. In fact, we should combine them.

Human reason affects all aspects of life, including our spiritual life. Therefore, combining these two approaches is critical for both truth-seekers and believers. A premise that follows is: Believe so that you can experience; experience so that you can believe. Both are correct and we need to combine them. If we only try one way, we will be like a person standing on one leg.

This applies to many areas of faith, but let's just look at a couple. For example, how can truth-seekers accept the Bible as the message of God, and not merely human copies of reproduced ancient Jewish stories? It is usually best to simply encourage them in the same manner: Believe so that you can experience; experience so that you can believe. In other words, we should encourage them to believe so that they can receive the Holy Spirit. Once they experience the Holy Spirit, it would be easy for them to believe in God and His word. Having believed in the Bible, they can then go into the storehouse of God's word to experience His promises daily. This becomes a positive-reinforcing cycle of faith.

Similarly, this principle applies to established church members since the Bible contains both of these approaches. Hebrews 11:6 tells us, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." To complement, 1 John 1:1 tells us, "That

We need to come to God in faith to be rewarded by Him; having seen, heard, and handled Him, we are able to believe in the Words of life. A healthy faith has both correct theology and experience.

which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life."

The Hebrews and 1 John passages illustrate how our faith in God is both top to bottom and bottom to top. We need to come to God in faith to be rewarded by Him; having seen, heard, and handled Him, we are able to believe in the Word of life. A healthy faith has both correct theology and experience.

Emphasizing one without the other is to be avoided. If theology is overemphasized, what results is a cerebral faith, a lifeless faith, with little or no servitude, and no Christian living. It must be a correct theology nonetheless. If seeking supernatural experiences and Christian living without doctrine is overemphasized, what results is something like Quakerism or similar religious phenomena. In the seventeenth century there are records of Quakers gathering at meeting houses waiting in silence for the Spirit to move them. If there was no inspiration by the Spirit, the entire congregation would leave without speaking a word. If supernatural experiences are emphasized without theology, then people will gravitate to the latest spiritual craze.

As a final illustration, in Orthodox Jewish liturgy, the five books of Moses are read together with the five books within Psalms. The reason falls along the

same line of thinking: God talks to us through the Torah, whereby we receive the Law and instruction (top to bottom); and we return to God through prayer by praying the Psalms (bottom to top). That is essentially why Bible reading and prayer are equally important. Emphasizing one without the other would result in a spiritual imbalance. So let us neglect neither.

Undoubtedly, in our journey of faith, there will always be more questions than answers. However, in the True Jesus Church today, this basic philosophical structure is something we can use for evangelism, apologetics, and cultivating our own faith. As a preacher once told me, our faith often goes through three stages: a blind faith, a reasonable faith, and finally an unshakable faith. When we reach the third stage, we have already explored and experienced God Himself under the framework of the basic biblical doctrines. Through this unshakable faith, questions that may have plagued us before are quieted by a natural reverence for such a personable God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who dwells in us and continues to guide us. Since we have believed in the living Word, and experienced how He has fulfilled His promises, we rest assured, for "the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever ..." (Deut 29:29). ★

Our faith often goes through three stages: a blind faith, a reasonable faith, and finally an unshakable faith. When we reach the third stage, we have already explored and experienced God Himself under the framework of the basic biblical doctrines.

In Him I Trust

Tan Guat Kim—Cheras, Malaysia



*The Lord is my strength and my shield;
My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped;
Therefore my heart greatly rejoices,
And with my song I will praise Him. (Ps 28:7)*

In Psalm 28:7, King David acknowledges God as “my strength and my shield”. He willingly places his trust in a reliable and faithful God, whose providential care is portrayed as the strength, fortress, and stronghold of His people.

He also declares that God, who radiates an undeniable strength and courage, is worthy of our trust. We can trust Him, who controls the universe, and watches over us with benevolent eyes. He is the One on whom we can pin our hope and confidence. This is a psalm of simple trust and universal glory, and this confidence and reliance on God is the manifestation of faith.

At times, our lives appear to unfold in uncertain ways. It may seem endless, tenuous, and uncharted, casting long shadows of doubts within us. But we must learn to trust in God during these periods, for it brings guidance and direction to our life.

When I reflect upon my past, I can see how God has taken me through periods of learning, growing, and, most importantly, trusting. Through the years, as I witnessed His divine guidance, I came to realize that I had to learn to trust in Him. I experienced God’s hand in my impressionable teenage years, when I had to make a difficult choice in my career, in my faith and marriage.

Like most people, I had youthful aspirations and ambitions, but these plans were often relegated to wishful dreams. However, I understood that bemoaning unfulfilled aspirations and ambitions would not help my future. My safest recourse was to place my trust in God, because I knew that my destiny was in His hands.

Since then, I have constantly pursued the meaning of trust and drawing strength from God as I continue in my Christian journey. Through my trust in Him, He has blessed me with a rewarding career, a harmonious and fulfilling marriage, and two wonderful children. Most importantly, I have experienced God’s guidance and forbearance.

I am grateful to God for responding to my trust because He has allowed me to work through my weaknesses, which tend to debilitate me. I am convinced that none of us can go through life without entrusting our problems to God.

I give thanks to God for His unparalleled blessings. As recorded in Psalm 33:21, I have learned to “[trust] in His holy name,” for this trust brings joy, guidance, and strength in God.

God is our fortitude, strength, and our shield, and we can find solace and refuge through our trust in Him.

*Every possible moment of mine will be to live for God
Every opportunity of being with Him is relished
Every experience of knowing Him is cherished.*

*Wherever my destiny may lie
Whenever be the time I must return to my Creator
Till then, may all my tomorrows belong to my God
And
I will live day to day by His grace ★*

A Beautiful Life

An Open Letter to My Beloved

ANON—West Malaysia

My beloved and dearest Wife,

Accept first my most sincere and heartfelt apologies for not being able to find the right words and the proper setting to write this to you. It has been a long time since I have last written to you ... too long. The failure of course is entirely mine.

*We have both tasted and experienced life together since the time we were united in Holy Matrimony, when we then both walked down the aisle joyously, with much anticipation for our life together after receiving the Lord's blessings through His minister. What a life - "la dolce vita" ... a **Beautiful** life under the mercies and embrace of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Beautiful**, not because our life was always filled with sweetness and joy No, far from that. We have tasted our fair share of sweet and joyous moments, but we have also tasted sorrows, regret and disappointment aplenty.*

*Yet **Beautiful** even in our moments of sorrow, despair and resentment, in times when we were down, when trials, tribulations and adversity were pouring down on us, when the seeds of disagreement, discord and discontentment had sprouted on our path – all these have allowed us to emerge stronger than before ... together ... under the guidance of our Heavenly Father. A blessing. A **Beauty**.*

*In this journey we have travailed together since we exchanged our vows before our Lord. We have since been blessed with offspring, **Beautiful** and wondrous gifts from our Lord, whom we both love and lavish with much affection. We have christened them all to the Lord, and we have both accepted the heavy duty to bring them up God-fearing. To instill the love of God and Christian values in children in this current corrupt and crumbling world is by no means an easy task; but it allows us the opportunity to serve our Lord as responsible parents and religious teachers, instructing our children in the path of salvation. What **Beautiful** times we have shared together as a family in laughter and tears, but most of all, in prayer and devotion, with our hands clasped together with that of the little ones. What bliss. What **Beauty**.*

*We love and cherish all our gifts and treasures that the Lord has entrusted to us, all **Beautiful**, all good. As we love them, we learn to love on a higher level than ever before; only now can we begin to fathom the love of the Lord for all of us as His children. Yet one of our treasures has been taken away, our **Beautiful** child whom we lost, whom our Lord has loved so deeply, so much more than we could ever have. He has been taken back, away from our hugs and kisses, to be with the Lord forever. We miss him dearly, and remember our child in our prayers every day, the child whom we can never again hold in this life who is the **Beautiful** bond of our family; the child whom we and his siblings will never ever forget.*

My wife, my beloved, I thank you for wanting so much for the betterment of our family and for giving up so much personal space and needs for the greater good. I treasure the fact that, over the years, your needs and your wants have been those of the family, over and above that

*of your personal needs and wants. I admire the courage and inner strength you have found to make the difficult decisions which I have cowered from, often in the face of many malign comments from myself and others too. Although you may have been discouraged, you never lost sight of what was important for you. These are **Beautiful** attributes. On behalf of our family, I thank you now, but I am sure the children will express their fulsome gratitude in their later years.*

*I ask that you will never lose sight of compassion and mercy, the true attributes of the Christian life that we profess. This will ensure that the life we have together will always be **Beautiful**. What are we without the compassion and mercies of God but outcasts in the land of the living dead? Through the mercy of the Lord and His compassion for us, we who are unworthy are made whole through the everlasting love of the Lord.*

Do also remember not to be too hasty and impulsive ... always think carefully before you act, and be patient as the Lord has been patient with us. He will have His time and His way. Listen to others and keep your ear close at all times to listen out to the soft whisperings of the Lord which can be easily drowned by the rigors and troubles of daily life and routine.

*Have faith that the Lord will have His **Beautiful** path and way. Faith is what happens when the Lord reaches out to us, as He always has and always will, and we respond with complete trust, love and submission. In our life together—yesterday, today and tomorrow—faith does not mean that there are no shocks in store, no crises, no tragedies. It does, however, mean that we will walk with God together, and live this life as husband and wife, as one family, without deserting one another. Although there will be trials, tribulations, pain, sorrows and disagreements, our Lord will always be there with us, giving us support and strength. We must always be there with Him. We must live this **Beautiful** life together. “La dolce vita”.*

My beloved, my wife, flesh of my flesh, “Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it” (Song 8:7).

Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies. Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, but a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. ... let her own works praise her in the gates. (Prov 31:10, 30, 31)

Yours lovingly,

Your Husband

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Author Guidelines and Editorial Calendar

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.

Please direct any questions to manna@tjc.org or 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.

Issue #66:

Topic: Family Focus

Articles due: November 15, 2011

Parents and children often disagree over many things, but one issue that can be particularly divisive is cultural differences. Children who grow up in a different culture from their parents face unique tensions and challenges in addition to the difficulty of maintaining their faith in a secular society. How can our faith help us to prevent or overcome such cultural clashes and generation gaps?

Issue #67:

Topic: The Bible

Articles due: February 15, 2012

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 in its latest edition.

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!

True Jesus Church
21217 Bloomfield Ave.
Lakewood, CA 90715 USA
Phone: +1-714-533-8808
Fax: +1-714-533-8878
info@tjc.org
<http://www.tjc.org>

LOOKING for MANNA?

Download your
FREE COPY of MANNA
or

subscribe online at
<http://www.mannamagazine.com>