

MANNA

ISSUE 79

Religious Education



**Religious Education Beyond the Classroom •
God's Preparation of Elijah • From Self-Reliance to Relying
on the Lord God Almighty**

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

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Religious Education

Editorial

by Samuel Kuo

Scripture reveals to us that at one point in Jewish history God lamented, “There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land” (Hos 4:1). He further mourned, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos 4:6a). Note that these grievances were not directed at the entire world; they were specific charges against God’s chosen people. God had an expectation of His beloved people, and they did not live up to it. Rather than walking in His ways, they betrayed the true and living God to join themselves to idols, harlotry, and wickedness (Hos 4:2,12). No wonder God’s “heart churns within [Him]” (Hos 11:8).

The apostolic church also stressed the importance of growing in spiritual knowledge. In the middle of a discourse concerning Jesus Christ as our High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek, the author of Hebrews digresses to reprove the members for their declining faith. The author bemoans, “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God” (Heb 5:12). It is clear the apostles also had expectations of the members. A lengthier time in Christ should naturally beget knowledgeable and mature believers—believers who would be able to instruct others. Instead, the members remained unskilled in the word, unable to discern, and dithered on the elementary principles of Christ (Heb 5:13–14; 6:1). The way the author continues also suggests these believers had regressed to the point of being borderline apostates (cf. Heb 6:4–8).

The people of God were “destroyed for lack of knowledge.” What about us? What are the things that we must know to ensure our salvation? Do we lack this knowledge? Do our children lack knowledge? Does our church lack knowledge? God was pained over that generation. How does He see ours?

The members of the apostolic church were admonished for their anemic growth. What about us? Are we growing in spiritual knowledge? In all of our years in Christ, have we graduated from milk to solid food? (Heb 5:12–14).

These historical incidents are not isolated cases. In fact they can be, and are, repeated in the church today. They thus highlight the great importance of a continual and comprehensive religious education for all believers. Clearly, it is not only for children, but also for adults. It is not only imparted in church classrooms, but also in the home. It is not only church workers who instruct, but parents are key in the molding of spiritual environments for their children.

Religious education is not only about imparting knowledge as an end-game. The knowledge eventually percolates into all aspects of living out our life for Christ. For how can we love someone we do not understand? How can we obey what we do not know? And how can we share what we do not comprehend? The foundation of all of these practical manifestations of faith is knowledge and understanding. Therefore, indeed, “Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD” (Hos 6:3).

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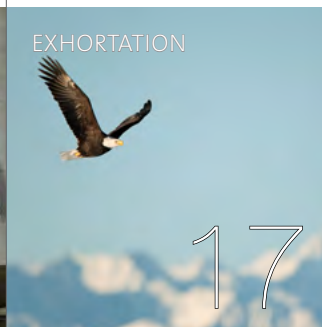
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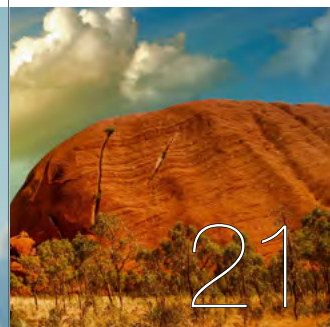
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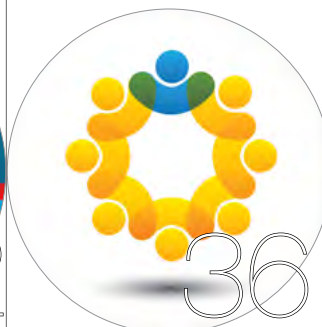


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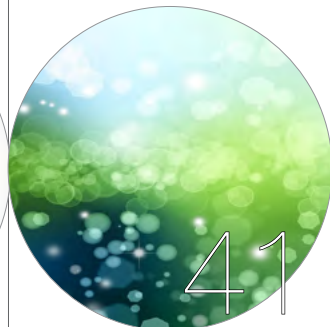


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Religious Education



Religious Education Beyond the Classroom

K.C. Tsai—Toronto, Canada

IMPERATIVE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The purpose of life is to seek God (Acts 17:26–27), to find the way back to Him (Jn 14:2–3, 6), and to prudently walk on this way. Our journey of faith is a life-long learning process where we are nurtured by God through our daily encounters. However, we tend to cling to the stereotypical impression of religious education (RE) as a passive process of classroom learning where the teacher imparts knowledge and dispels doubts, and the students receive what is taught. In fact, when teachers prepare themselves for their lessons by memorizing biblical stories, writing lecture notes, and conducting themselves in exemplary ways consistent with the Bible, these teachers are also receiving RE.

There are two key reasons why RE is particularly important in the twenty-first century: first, the increasing divergence between secular and biblical paradigms; and second, the potential lack of a home environment that is conducive to the cultivation of faith.

Differences Between World Views and Biblical Principles

Secular principles—be these common sense or accepted conventions—are not always consistent with biblical teachings (Jas 4:4; 1 Jn 2:15). The purpose of RE is to instill faith and the right beliefs in students so they can discern between worldly concepts and biblical teachings.

Man's Way vs. God's Way

There are numerous disparities between worldly and biblical concepts:

- People who do not know God and recognize His authority often turn to human rights. Some may take this to the extreme by advocating absolute individualism, which allows every man or woman to do whatever is right in his or her own eyes. This is exactly what Moses warned the Israelites against before they entered the Promised Land (Deut 12:8).
- From the world's perspective, a man who works hard can take all the credit when he achieves a goal. But the Bible teaches us that chance and opportunities are provided by God (Eccl 9:11); so we ought to give glory to God.
- Modern man values personal opinions and ideas over the search for the will of God. Society encourages us to fight for things that we think are right (Deut 12:8). But things deemed right in human eyes are not necessarily biblically correct! God wants His people to always do what is good and right in His sight (Deut 12:28). The Bible also exhorts us to do nothing through selfish ambition or conceit; instead, in lowliness of mind, each man should esteem others better than himself (Phil 2:3).
- Apostle Paul taught that one should not avenge himself, for God says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" (Rom 12:19). Yet in movies and media, we often see heroes taking things into their own hands.

Lack of a Home Environment Conducive to Religious Education

The time that our children spend attending church RE classes is limited. Hence, their actual learning of the precepts of their faith takes place at home. The effectiveness of such learning would be highly dependent on their parents' values, faith, and lifestyle. If parents are to successfully raise a generation of godly offspring, they themselves must first have good RE.

Children Learn What They Live

A child's attitude towards his faith is shaped by the adults around him:

- When a child grows up to be uncertain of whom he has believed, and eventually chooses to leave the church, look at the family. Although friends and the environment influence a child, the uncertainty or disillusionment usually stems from the foundation of the family.
- When we see a youth who is pessimistic, full of grievances and unwilling to forgive, the family is likely full of criticism and grumbling. He lives in a home that lacks thanksgiving.
- When we hear a young person often talking about values that deviate from biblical principles, one can surmise a family life inclined towards the world instead of rooted in God's love and word.

OLD TESTAMENT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION—THE WILDERNESS CLASSROOM

You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you. (Deut 8:5)

Throughout the Bible, God's emphasis on RE is clear. He allowed His people to journey in the wilderness for forty years, eating bland and tasteless food (Num 11:4–6), and living in a harsh and difficult environment (Ex 15:22–24; 17:1–3), in order to educate them. As Moses



said, "you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not" (Deut 8:2–3). The forty years of wandering in the wilderness were the consequence of the Israelites' sin of infidelity (cf. Num 14:33—they did not believe in God's promise and were unwilling to enter Canaan out of fear). However, when the journey was drawing to an end, Moses told them it was God who used those forty years to train them, providing them with the most comprehensive RE.

In those forty years, they learned to live on God's word and His providence. From the tabernacle, Moses brought out the word of God to transform God's people into a holy nation, a kingdom of priests.

Today, religious education is to cultivate spiritual priests.

NEW TESTAMENT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION—CULTIVATING A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD

Cultivating Priests

The Israelites' exodus from Egypt was a highly eventful process. Before reaching Sinai, they had been pursued by the Egyptians, challenged by the Red Sea, attacked by Amalekites, and for three days, had no water in sight. It was indeed a close shave. But God said that He bore them on

eagles' wings and brought them to Himself. He removed the Egyptian soldiers, opened a path in the Red Sea, eliminated the Amalekites, and provided water from the rock. It was only at Mount Sinai that they realized how God had protected them throughout their journey. God wanted them to be a special treasure to Him above all people, to be His kingdom of priests, His holy nation (Ex 19:4–6).

There was a purpose to God's education of His people. It was for them to be a people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations (Num 23:9) but conducting themselves in accordance with the principles taught by God. They were trained to abide by the law regarding cleanliness and to differentiate between holy and secular things.

The book of Leviticus provides a guide on how to be a priest, as well as how to establish a society of God. It charts the transformation from slavery to priesthood, from the lowly people in Egypt to a holy nation. As such, this God-given textbook of priestly conduct is also applicable to us today.

Making Offerings

In the Old Testament, priests offered burnt offering, grain offering, peace offering (offered in thanksgiving, to fulfill a vow, or to offer up willingly, cf. Lev 7:15), sin offering, and trespass offering. In Jesus' new covenant, His followers offer spiritual sacrifices. They are to examine themselves daily

“Our journey of faith is a life-long learning process where we are nurtured by God through our daily encounters.”



and offer up prayers of repentance to maintain a harmonious relationship with God.

In particular, believers ought to present their bodies as a living sacrifice; holy and acceptable to God (Rom 12:1). The old covenant accepted animals as sacrifices. Those animals were offered against their will. They had to be slaughtered before they were laid on the altar. Such are dead sacrifices. In the new covenant, the believer does not offer up sacrificial animals. Instead, he offers up himself willingly, while alive.

God, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from God and devoured them, and they died before Him (Lev 10:1–3).

In today's context, the purpose of carrying out church work is to serve the Lord, not to fulfill our personal ideals or ambitions (Deut 12:8). If we are resolved to serve, we must first learn the proper way of service prescribed by God (Deut 12:28). This requires diligent study of the Bible and full submission to His word. What God requires of man is to fear Him by following His command (Gen 22:12; Deut 10:12), as well as to do justly,

on the Mount, the Lord Jesus further expounded on the Commandments. With regard to the commandment "You shall not murder", He said that whoever was angry with his brother without a cause would be in danger of the judgment (Mt 5:21–22). With regard to the commandment "You shall not commit adultery", He said that whoever looked at a woman and lusted after her had already committed adultery with her in his heart. These Ten Commandments and the teachings of Jesus constitute the most fundamental content of RE and are every godly parent's basic tools for raising children whom God loves.

The aim of Jesus' RE is to implant the fear of God in the heart of man. God is in heaven and man on earth (Eccl 5:2). Man has to walk prudently before Him because He searches the heart of man and watches his daily handling of affairs (Ps 139:23–24). Other than honesty and sincerity in the fear of God, there are many other spiritual virtues taught in the Bible. All these must be integrated into our lives if we are to reclaim the image and likeness of God.

Everyone needs God's word to build up spiritual values and concepts, enabling us to make Bible-based judgments for everyday decisions.

You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 2:5)

A willing sacrifice means that we rid ourselves of our own will and that we are completely committed to give what the Lord requires. Today's RE requires that the educator accompany those who are being nurtured in the offering of themselves as a living sacrifice and in the process of growing up in faith.

Using Holy Fire

The two sons of Aaron were priests, ordained to serve in the tabernacle according to the commandments of God. However, they each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before

love mercy and walk humbly with Him (Mic 6:8).

Instilling the Fear of God

God is love (1 Jn 4:8). His is a genuine love which may lead Him to refine His people through adversities in their lives. However, God is also a consuming fire (Heb 12:29). He demands purity and holiness from His loved ones.

In the third month after Israel's exodus from Egypt, they reached the Wilderness of Sinai (Ex 19:1). There, God gave them the Ten Commandments: they were taught to serve God and to establish a relationship with Him (the first four commandments); they were also taught the principles of handling interpersonal relationships in order to be pleasing to God (the next six commandments). Later, in the Sermon

Nurturing Royalty

Apostle Peter addressed the congregation, which mainly comprised non-Jews (cf. Acts 13:44–49), of the various churches in Asia Minor as the elect according to the foreknowledge, the eternal wisdom, of God the Father (1 Pet 1:1–2). They were a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, holy unto God (1 Pet 2:9). Although recipients of his letter were the churches of Asia Minor, the message is meant for all who have been redeemed, namely, the believers of the true church. It is to tell them that they are a nation of priests. With the royal priesthood, they serve God and are redeemed to Him (Rev 5:9–10).

The objective of God's election is to bestow the royal priesthood upon His people. Being royal is to have the dignity and majesty of a king, sovereign without constraints of death and sin (1 Cor 15:55–58). Those who have been redeemed by the Lord's precious blood shall reign on the earth

“We have to be filled with biblical concepts and values if we are to continue walking upright. We need to be reminded of how the saints would have responded in a similar situation. This then is the essence of the lifelong RE that can help form our shield of faith (cf. Eph 6:16).”

(Rev 5:10); they will triumph over the world (1 Jn 5:4–5), no longer under its bondage (Heb 2:14–15). They will not be tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men or in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting (Eph 4:13–14). On the contrary, they will be able to transcend worldly trends through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the truth of salvation.

Knowing the Common Beliefs and Practicing Proper Exegesis

However, the Lord Jesus has warned that false prophets would rise up to deceive many before His coming and the end of the age (Mt 24:10–11). Many will also stumble due to their lack of the understanding of the truth. Believers' ability to discern will thus be challenged as never before. Therefore, it is vital for all believers to be familiar with the common beliefs of the church. Furthermore, besides clearly explaining the common beliefs, RE must include training on hermeneutic principles so that believers are able to detect inappropriate interpretation of the Bible.

Mastering Biblical Passages

Man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD (Deut 8:3). With the word of God, the Israelites survived the journey through the wilderness. Likewise, His words will enable us to make the right choices between life and death, blessing and cursing (Deut 30:19).

Everyone needs God's word to build up spiritual values and concepts, enabling us to make Bible-based judgments for everyday decisions. Although mundane, memorizing key Bible verses is the most fundamental part of RE. Some may see this as “brain washing,” but we should be

thankful that our brains are washed by God's word, for His word sanctifies and cleanses (Eph 5:26).

CONCLUSION

In a world of Internet and online activities, we are constantly bombarded by information. We need the ultimate and immutable standard of morality and values by which we can examine everything that we see, hear or read. That standard can only come from the Bible. We have to be filled with biblical concepts and values if we are to continue walking upright. We need to be reminded of how the saints would have responded in a similar situation. This then is the essence of the lifelong RE that can help form our shield of faith (cf. Eph 6:16).

Lifelong RE may be a mammoth task, since biblical teachings may be challenged by secular values and beliefs: the fiery darts of the devil. Therefore, entrenching God's word in our hearts is our basic, if not sole, defense to the diverse values and temptations dangled in front of us by the ruler of the world. In addition, we must always be mindful of our status as royal priests elected to fear, love, and serve the Lord. This status was purchased with the precious blood of our Savior and is available to our succeeding generations with the proviso that all of us play our part in conducting a successful RE beyond the classroom. ★



God Commanded Religious Education

Based on a sermon by Aun-Quek Chin—Singapore

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: FOR WHOM?

Traditional Chinese wisdom tells us that when there are three persons walking together, one is bound to be a teacher (*sān rén xíng, bì yǒu wǒ shī yān*). The sage who issued this adage understood that our teachers are all around us: we need only be humble enough to constantly learn in order to grow. If humility and mutual edification are required to gain secular wisdom, they are even more important when learning the living word of God.

For this reason, we must remind ourselves that religious education is not just for the young, but for Christians of all ages. On one occasion, God said, “Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear

the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law” (Deut 31:12). No one is too old, too experienced, or too wise to be taught the word of God; God intends for everyone to learn His truth.

WHO SHOULD PROVIDE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION?

God calls us to worship Him and to learn His word as one family and one body. This is a call some have rejected, choosing instead to worship separate from the rest of God’s children, tailoring their services to suit their own preference and convenience. The command in Deuteronomy 12:5 is not to be forgotten: “But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go.”

Today, God has designated the church to be where His name is

established. As the church is the body of Christ, we ought to congregate at this appointed sanctuary and worship as one body.

Having said this, we should not limit the teaching of the truth to the confines of the church building. The home is also an excellent place to share and impart God’s word. The familiar edict of Deuteronomy 6:6–9 reads,

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Addressed to parents, these words speak of the need for the home to be an environment that encourages children to learn God’s word. This is because, outside of the home, children will face situations and value systems that challenge and distort their faith: the need to strive for

“Religious education is not just for the young, but for Christians of all ages. ... No one is too old, too experienced, or too wise to be taught the word of God; God intends for everyone to learn His truth.

worldly success, to make money, to gain prominence in society, the list continues.

Religious education is no easy task. To implement it successfully, parents, church ministers, and the rest of the spiritual family must work together. Be it at the lively dinner table or the serene church sanctuary, parents and teachers should actively encourage young Christians to familiarize themselves with religious matters.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Many make the mistake of thinking that religious education is only useful for Bible study sessions or for understanding the more profound messages from the pulpit. In truth, the benefits of religious education are far richer.

“Religious education is the key to preserving the truth of the gospel that the True Jesus Church holds dearly, preventing the perversion of truth when passed across generations.”

Preserving the Truth

Firstly, religious education is the key to preserving the truth of the gospel that the True Jesus Church holds dearly, preventing the perversion of truth when passed across generations.

Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, Spain, Germany: these are some of the many lands where Jews have been subjugated, persecuted, enslaved, and slaughtered. Displaced and despised, how did they prevent their culture, traditions, and faith from being diluted through assimilation, systemic discrimination, and genocide? Their secret was a careful and rigorous system of religious education. Because of this, the Jews did not forget their God, and God did not forget His people. One cannot but be constantly reminded of God's instructions when they are “frontlets between your eyes.” Even when the Jews found themselves at the mercy of different empires, their hearts remained rooted in the Scriptures. This is the fruit of religious education.

When implemented correctly,

religious education benefits both parents and children. It teaches all that the imparting of the truth must continue, even as everything else around us crumbles. The “least of all peoples” (Deut 7:7) survived the greatest of afflictions through the power of the Scriptures. Therefore, the best way for the truth to be perpetuated is through religious education both in the church and in the home.

A Thoughtful Faith

Secondly, through religious education, the young in our church learn the importance of having an independent, thoughtful faith. A strong personal faith comes from introspection and from being open to correction. A feeble faith, on the other hand, is passive, where one relies on others—parents, peers, preachers—and expects spoon feeding instead of actively pursuing one's own spiritual growth.

Jesus guided His disciples to develop their own faith. “Who do the crowds say that I am?” Jesus asked them (Lk 9:18–20). Their answers were unsurprisingly mixed: “John the Baptist, but some say Elijah; and others say that one of the old prophets has risen again.” Jesus then cuts through the confusion with the more direct question: “But who do you say that I am?” Peter, ever-valiant, readily offers the correct answer. Would we have offered the same answer?

The need for a personal, thoughtful

faith is not something that only Jesus highlighted; it was set out by God long before, in the Old Testament. He told the Israelites to prepare their children to ask about the customs and historical narratives of the nation. But in order to relay this knowledge, they themselves had to be aware of the profundity of their faith. Herein lie two important lessons. First, parents, RE teachers, ministers, and other members of the church have a responsibility to understand the gospel message to a reasonable degree, to be able to relay the core teachings of the Bible competently. Second, God does not want His believers to have a careless and unthinking faith. To take our faith seriously is to meditate on His word, to sincerely seek resolutions to any doubts, and above all, to be honest about our faith.

Today, it is easy to become lost in the frenzy of information, opinions, and ideas that is available just a mouse-

A Bonus for parents

According to Chinese philosophy, learning goes both ways between teachers and students. As parents and teachers, we must be ready and willing to learn more about the truth as we teach the younger generation. Indeed, by nurturing the curiosity of young people about religious matters, we will acquire new insights into old problems. Through ongoing dialogue and the exchange of questions and answers with our children, we will “always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks [us] a reason for the hope that is in [us]” (1 Pet 3:15).



The Bible, rich with vivid illustrations of human tribulation, provides powerful consolation by revealing the glory of God's grace. It is good to share such lessons early, to prepare our children for the inevitable sufferings and problems they will experience.

WORKING TOGETHER

For religious education to be effective, it has to pervade the lives of our children at all times. Restricting it to an hour-long lecture in the church classroom each weekend has minimal impact. If parents and RE teachers can demonstrate the power of their lessons through their actions, children would be better equipped to live out biblical principles, having seen firsthand how Christians ought to live. The church and the household have to work in tandem to enable our young brethren to inherit the truth, to cultivate a spirit of inquisitiveness and introspection, and to develop a resilient faith of the sort described by Paul:

We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

(2 Cor 4:8–10)

“It takes a village to raise a child,” so the traditional African proverb goes. But to raise a child of God, it only takes a family; and we are that family. ★

click away. We could easily become like “children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14b). To counteract this, we need to adopt the true spirit of religious education: to have a clear understanding, for yourself, of why you believe what you believe.

Religious education works by instilling a spirit of curiosity about religious topics and an earnestness in meditating on the words of the Bible. Students are taught to ask questions, clarify doubts, and cultivate their faith on a personal level. Moreover, in the classroom setting, they learn different perspectives and share personal experiences, which is helpful in developing a thoughtful faith. For example, when brothers and sisters with different backgrounds and life experiences share their understanding of biblical truths, all parties are edified as they realize the universality and relevance of God's word in their own lives. This helps them to develop a personal faith that can remain resolute when challenged by un-Christian views and situations.

A Resilient Faith

Thirdly, religious education prepares Christians, young and old alike, to bear their own cross for Christ.

There is a tale of a boy who had a beloved pet pig. As his father was a pig farmer, the future of this pet haunted the boy. One day, the father announced that he would slaughter

the pig on a certain day, and told his son that his assistance would be expected. Outraged at the cruelty of his father, the boy resolved to remain stoic and to deny him the pleasure of seeing him suffer. However, the day came and went; and the pig survived. As it transpired, the father was dying, and he had known it for some time. Distraught at the thought of leaving his son to fend for himself, he had devised a plan to impart a final gift: the gift of strength in the face of death. He had announced the day of slaughter to prepare his son to confront death without fear. And so, when the father passed away soon afterwards, the boy did not lament loudly, but wept silently, bolstered now by an inner strength.

For Christians, suffering is not just a possibility—it is a certainty. Therefore, to prepare our children for the thorny road to salvation is to teach them that God grants both peace and calamity (Isa 45:7), and that they must accept both willingly, knowing that by His grace they can triumph. Religious education enables them to be resilient, able to withstand the buffeting of tribulation, the seduction of temptation, and the wearing-down of fatigue. In addition to biblical knowledge, true faith must be sustained by moral value and character.

This is where religious education comes in. Children must be taught the uncompromising reality of suffering.

“A strong personal faith comes from introspection and from being open to correction. A feeble faith, on the other hand, is passive, where one relies on others—parents, peers, preachers—and expects spoon feeding instead of actively pursuing one's own spiritual growth.”



Religious Education—Creating and Maintaining an Environment for Spiritual Growth

F.F. Chong—London, UK

It has long been recognized within the church that religious education (RE) is integral to the spiritual future of the church and spiritual wellbeing of each individual believer. However, whose responsibility is it to provide RE for the young and lifelong RE for adult believers? What are the strategies, systems, and structures that the church needs to deliver RE effectively?

RE IS A COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

It is widely acknowledged today that secular learning is lifelong, and impressionable children learn from everything and everyone around them. But God had long set this principle. In the Old Testament, He established a testimony in Jacob and a law in Israel and commanded the fathers to make this known to every generation (Ps 78:5–6). This clear divine principle remains unchanged—the elders amongst God's people are to faithfully convey God's law and instructions to the succeeding generations. RE does not simply happen within the four walls of the church's classroom. It is not the sole responsibility of RE teachers, but is the collective responsibility of every

“RE does not simply happen within the four walls of the church's classroom. It is not the sole responsibility of RE teachers, but is the collective responsibility of every parent and every church worker.”

parent and every church worker.

God has also clearly set out the objectives of RE: to shape a godly mindset and to warn against the dangers of not setting one's heart aright before Him (Ps 78:7–8). Meeting these objectives will enable His people to live a God-centered life, regardless of circumstance. How, then, can we cultivate an environment that allows all of us to effectively convey God's word to His people?

BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR RE

Equip Spiritual Educators with the Truth

The primary ingredient in any education system is the quality of the people tasked to deliver the education – the educators. Since these spiritual educators work for a spiritual education system, the spiritual

qualities of educators are paramount.

To accomplish the mammoth task of imparting God's word accurately and faithfully, all who teach must be adequately equipped with the truth. They need to search the word of God with a prayerful heart, and have a strong and constant desire to pursue deeper knowledge of God's word. His word, His guidance and His abidance with us are inextricably linked. The deeper our relationship with God, the more we want to study His word and, therefore, the closer we shall draw to Him. When we are close to God, His guidance and help in our ministry will be a natural consequence.

God's guidance is critical for RE work. We must first teach and save ourselves before doing the same for others. Having been freed from sin and given the capacity to teach, we must use God's word to explain how we should live a victorious life in the

face of corruption and deception. Saving others and ourselves will only be a reality if, and only if, we hold on to the pattern of the truth. This pattern has been given to the church by the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Tim 1:13–14) and it forms the foundation of our faith. If we were to shift or change the foundation of the church, its entire faith would collapse, much like a building falling on itself in a demolition. Therefore, it is essential that teachers be trained and rooted in the sound pattern of God's word. This ensures that the core precepts of our faith are conveyed from one generation to the next. The foundation of the church will hence be intact.

Encourage Spiritual Educators to Live What They Teach

“Actions speak louder than words”—this adage is critical for effective RE. RE is not just about words. It is about imparting the life of Christ to students. God's principles are concretely demonstrated when teachers lead a life worthy of Christ. Those who teach God's principles must be models for the church, particularly for the young, by living a God-fearing life.

Understanding God's teachings and putting them into practice is not always easy; for some, it can be abstract. However, walking in God's principles is well worth the effort. Not only are we securing our own salvation, our effort to translate God's word into action will help members, both young and old, understand how to live out a godly life. Our conduct often has more impact on believers than mere words.

A great challenge for spiritual educators is the perversity of the secular environment that we have to continue to live in. There are RE teachers who try to separate their lives into two parts—“private” and “religious”—and try to keep one away from the other. They argue that private space and behavior are rights that ought not to be infringed upon. For example, they feel that they are entitled to behave like their non-Christian friends when they are not within the confines of the church. However, if we have received a solid

RE and are rooted in the faith, we will always remain godly in every aspect of life regardless of whom we spend time with. This means being mindful of God's principles above all else in speech, conduct, and thoughts, no matter where we are: at home or away, in or outside church.

Those who impart God's word have to be beacons of light in this dark world. We can shine if Christ is abiding in our lives. As we live and walk in God's word, the Word shines forth in our lives. This is how it works. By nature, no man can do good in God's eyes—human nature requires constant transformation (cf. Rom 12:2). However, when we put on the nature of God (Col 3:10), doing good will become part and parcel of our inner selves (cf. Eph 2:10). Such ability to naturally do good will be a shining example to all.

and sophisticated. Such strategies are very difficult to identify without spiritual insight from God. The scripture warns us not to draw near to places which are spiritual booby traps. However, such has society become today that we need not even step outside our homes to be gravely attacked or influenced. The introduction of home entertainment has intensified the spiritual onslaught against God's children. Films and television serial dramas may appear to be harmless entertainment but the values and conduct these espouse is a subtle injection of venom into our spiritual lives. They numb our sensitivity to sin and increase our thirst for the world's pleasures; unchecked, these lead to spiritual feebleness and even death.

Falling away from His grace is not just something that has happened occasionally to one or two families. It

“Actions speak louder than words”—this adage is critical for effective RE. RE is not just about words. It is about imparting the life of Christ to students. God's principles are concretely demonstrated when teachers lead a life worthy of Christ. Those who teach God's principles must be models for the church, particularly for the young, by living a God-fearing life.

Return to Where God Wants Us to Be

Jesus once said that He would give His disciples the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, to have power over the enemy and to be unharmed by them (Lk 10:19). This is a very reassuring promise from the Lord, but the reality is quite different. Many of our children (and adults) have been taken captive by the power of the wicked one. Some of them, very unfortunately, have adopted non-Christian attitudes and behave very much like unbelievers. They live lives completely separate from the life of Christ.

One reason for such a drastic departure from the faith is Satan's influence on Christian families today. Satan's strategies are cunning, subtle

is an unprecedented problem and its scale is unimaginable. We sometimes experience our spiritual strength being drained away by the things of the world, slipping into lethargies from which we can no longer easily recover. The resulting effect is a rapid decline in faith and zeal to serve and worship God—a critical sign of complete spiritual bankruptcy that must not be ignored.

In Revelation, the woman, who is the church, was given two wings of an eagle to fly back to the wilderness, to her place, where she is nourished (Rev 12:14). Satan's corrupting influence on believers has led the church to wander away from where God first took her: the wilderness—a place where she is nourished. In other words, the church has shifted

away from where she is supposed to be. If the church does not return to where she was before, she will be swept away by the fearsome flood generated by the dragon (Rev 12:15).

HOW CAN THE CHURCH RETURN?

According to Elder John, the two wings given to the woman (the church) allowed her to fly back to her proper place. In the book of Exodus, God likened His salvation for His people to an eagle with great wings bringing them back to Himself (Ex 19:4). Similarly, the church today can only return through God's great mercy and power.

However, the world has a strong grip on our believers and the Ancient Foe will not give up this grip easily. While God offers these wings, we must respond by taking up these wings to fly with great determination. Moses tells us specifically what returning entails: the chosen must assemble to listen to the word of God and obediently keep the Lord's commandments all the days of their lives (Deut 6:2–3). This will enable them to draw distinct boundaries against corruption and allow them to keep themselves in the Lord.

There are four main points in this Mosaic instruction that the chosen must inscribe on their hearts and minds:

1. The Lord is the only true God (Deut 6:4)—there must be no other gods, visible or invisible, besides the Lord God. The presence of God will not abide with a believer if foreign gods are found in his/her midst (Ps 81:9).

2. Love the Lord wholeheartedly (Deut 6:5)—the chosen people are required to love the Lord with their whole being. God, being a jealous God, will not tolerate anything less



than complete loyalty and faithfulness (Ex 20:5; Deut 4:24).

3. Keep God's commands in your heart (Deut 6:6)—the chosen are to follow the Lord's commands. In order to love the Lord fully, we must not stray from the prescribed path. God abides with us when we apply His word fully and consistently in our lives (Jn 15:7).

4. Teach the chosen people completely (Deut 6:7–8)—the chosen are required to listen to and to know every aspect of God's word. Only by knowing and understanding His commands can they go on to carefully keep these (11:8–9; 12:1; 13:18). When we strive to know and keep His teachings, God's promised blessings follow (11:27).

MEETING NEW CHALLENGES

Many of us who have served as educators would be familiar with the phenomenon of the sudden decline in faith, e.g., the exemplary youth who suddenly stops coming to church or the student who has attended every RE class, bible camp, and student spiritual convocation but falls to temptation in young adulthood. The Lord reminds us that even one lost sheep is a loss too many (cf. Lk 15:1–7). Therefore, the church (ministers, RE teachers, and parents) should always be alert to signs of disengagement by our students, e.g., loss of interest in church activities, increasing skepticism

about the church's beliefs and so on. In addition, the church must also look at what areas of modern life are particularly harmful to our sheep.

There are perhaps two aspects that tend to be overlooked because of its apparent innocuousness. The first is the pervasive smartphone. From being an instrument that merely allowed us to be contacted easily, this tiny device now occupies virtually every facet of our life. We wake up to its alarm in the morning; it reminds us of our appointments; ensures that we can contact and be contacted 24/7; and provides updates on the world and entertainment on demand. For some, the world seems to just function within the cyber-world of their handsets, rendering them oblivious to the physical world. One of the factors contributing to this is the dominance of social media in the lives of youths in general.

The second is relaxation, which includes holidaying in different places and watching movies. For many of us, these are ways to find some relief from the stresses and worries of our busy lives. But like many things, done excessively, these forms of relaxation may absorb so much of our time and focus that they distract us from our faith. Worse still, the activities we pursue while on holiday, as well as the values and behavior we absorb from movies, may well make us unable to discern between the secular and divine.

Provide Guidelines

To help create an environment where God's word is readily available for her believers (cf. Deut 6:8), the church (ministers, RE teachers, and local church board members) may want to consider establishing a set

Our effort to translate God's word into action will help members, both young and old, understand how to live out a godly life. Our conduct often has more impact on believers than mere words.



in turn, encourage young people to follow in these good footsteps. This healthy combination of RE education and reliance on God's mercy and power will surely build up a strong and God-fearing church. ★

of practical guidelines that will help our students avoid an addiction to their smartphones and the pursuit of relaxation. Some guiding questions to help us arrive at these guidelines are:

PRUDENT USE OF HANDSETS

- Is your devotional time to God or are prayer sessions regularly disrupted by mobile notifications?
- Has your or your children's use of handsets at night time affected your family's ability to have family altar time?
- Are we using our handsets to access inappropriate websites?

APPROPRIATE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- Is our behavior on social media reflective of our status as Christians?
- Do we indulge in irrelevant and irreverent chatting rather than use our social media accounts to encourage others, post edifying stories, and invite our friends to church?
- Are we spending so much time on social media platforms that we have little time left over to deepen our relationship with God and serve Him more?
- Are the comments and posts we share and "like" on social media harmful to the church's image and/or our spiritual lives?

RELAXING THE RIGHT WAY

- Don't be drained by activities: Has sightseeing become even more stressful than a normal work day or a day at home?
- Visit True Jesus Churches appropriately: When we visit places where there are True Jesus Churches, do we become a burden or inconvenience to believers or the church when we visit?
- Stay godly: Do we regard holidays

as a license to indulge in lusts or sinful activities? Do we still make it a point to honor the Sabbath and keep it holy as one would do at home, e.g., seek a church in your holidaying area or keep the Sabbath with family members or church brethren? Do we realize that our attitudes to holidays will influence the young people watching us? Has our behavior inadvertently caused them to fall instead?

Emphasize Prayer Continually

To ensure that we have the strength and wisdom to meet new challenges that the world throws at us, prayer is of utmost importance. Besides encouraging members to lead a prayerful life, the church should create more opportunities for members to pray, e.g., having fifteen-minute prayers before and after service or prayers between services on the Sabbath. When the connection between ourselves and God is secure, fostered by learning God's word and constant prayer, the church will surely stand strong in the face of any challenge.

CONCLUSION

Imparting God's word fully and accurately is integral to a successful RE system. But beyond this, it is just as critical for us to help our students walk in God's word. This will grow increasingly challenging as we become more and more connected to the world through technology. Therefore, the church must implement guidelines and share them in sermons and in RE classes. This way, parents will be able to inculcate God-fearing behaviors in their children, and both adults and young people will be edified. Adults must first set a good example by living disciplined lives at home, and this will,



Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. (Lk 2:46)

At the early age of twelve, Jesus already knew the importance of learning and understanding more about God. Opportunities to draw near to God come not only when we are mature, but can start when we are young, and eager to learn and increase our knowledge. This is why the True Jesus Church has established a structured religious education (RE) system based on a comprehensive Bible-based curriculum. The objectives of religious education are to:

1. Impart spiritual knowledge to the students and build up the pure faith within them (2 Tim 3:15; Col 3:16).
2. Guide students toward Christ-like behavior and teach them to live a Christian way of life (Prov 22:6; Mt 5:14–16).
3. Guide students to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit and to serve in the kingdom of God (Gal 5:22–23; Acts 1:8).
4. Train students to preach and be

effective witnesses with the power of the Holy Spirit and the word of God (2 Tim 4:2; Mk 16:15–18; Mt 24:14).

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SYSTEM

In the United States (US), the RE system comprises weekly classes, as well as convocations and theological seminars, for students aged from four to twenty-two, to help them build a lifelong faith. Weekly RE classes are divided into these age groups:

- Kindergarten (4–5 years old)
- Elementary 1 (6–8 years old)
- Elementary 2 (9–11 years old)
- Junior 1 (12–14 years old)
- Junior 2 (15–17 years old)
- Senior (18–22 years old)

SEMINARS AND CONVOCATIONS

In addition, the US General Assembly (USGA) organizes spiritual convocations and theological seminars throughout the year to support the religious education of both young and old alike. These range from student spiritual convocations for participants aged nine and above, to national adult theological seminars for our members aged forty-plus. These courses bring home the importance of pursuing a lifelong learning of the word of

God and fulfill the four religious education objectives. Each event is based around a specific theme, and includes Scripture-based classes, life application teachings, and testimony sessions.

When taken in tandem with weekly RE classes at the local church level, these seminars and convocations provide a comprehensive Bible-based education that equips the participants with the word of God on their lifelong journey of faith.

SHARING

Below, a college student shares how attending religious education events has impacted her life:

The summer before I started fourth grade, I took the first step of my spiritual journey when I attended Student Spiritual Convocation (SSC). The first thing that came to my mind about a one-week church camp was having to pray constantly and read the Bible every day, things that I, like most children, did not enjoy. I did not want to leave home for a week to go to an unfamiliar place. But, through the encouragement of my parents and church teachers, I ended up going. I had mixed feelings of anxiety,

OTHER COURSES

Missionary Training Courses

Targeting primarily youths, the USGA Training Department conducts an annual Pioneer Missionary Volunteer Program (PMVP) which coincides with the National Youth Theological Seminar (NYTS). PMVP is a four-week course that runs over two years. To graduate from this course, students are also expected to intern as volunteer counselors or missionary assistants for another four weeks.

Workers' Training Courses

To provide spiritual cultivation and fellowship opportunities for ministers from the US and Canada, the USGA conducts a five-day ministers' workshop annually.

To ensure continuous availability of workers, the USGA also runs a theological training program (TTP) to train suitable brethren for full-time ministry.

CONCLUSION

Religious education has always been the responsibility of God's chosen people. Moses said to the Israelites:

"Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged. Therefore hear, O Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you, and that you may multiply greatly as the LORD God of your fathers has promised you—'a land flowing with milk and honey.'"

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."

"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

(Deut 6:1–9)

frustration, and fear as my parents left me at the church in Garden Grove for my first SSC. However, I quickly found that my counselors were very welcoming, and there were many other kids my age who were feeling the same way as I was. I gradually adapted to the environment around me and made new friends who have since become my close spiritual companions.

That SSC was special because I received the precious Holy Spirit, whom I longed for after seeing others around me receiving the Holy Spirit. By the end, I did not want to leave because I felt that the church had become my home—a warm and familiar place.

In the years following that SSC, I began to look forward to each upcoming event. Each time, I learned something new about the Bible through the various topics and teachings given. Because events such as Winter Student Spiritual Convocation and Regional High School Theological Seminar were directed specifically towards a certain age group, they were especially edifying and relatable. Moreover, I received a vast number of spiritual lessons that still remain with me now.

After attending my first National Youth Theological Seminar this past summer, I realized that I have come a long way on my spiritual journey and that God is truly abiding with

me through these events. This is now my own faith and not my father or mother's faith.

These events help me to revive my spiritual life, which may have faltered after a long year in school, and remind me of God's love and His continual guidance in my everyday routines. Being able to meet my spiritual buddies in person instead of virtually also enforces the act of praying together and interceding for one another.

Attending these seminars and convocations every year allows me not only to gain more biblical knowledge but also to spiritually mature and grow in God's teachings. There are never too many events to attend and it is always such an amazing opportunity to be able to build up servitude in Christ and to experience His love.

RE Teachers' Training

Established by the USGA in 1992, the Religious Education Teacher Seminar (RETS) focuses on equipping new teachers with skills to systematically teach the word of God with the power of the Holy Spirit. "Therefore, a teacher must do his best to present himself as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

RETS is held once every two years. It is a weeklong seminar, covering topics such as roles and responsibilities of an RE teacher, understanding and teaching the Ten Basic Beliefs, spiritual cultivation, lesson planning, teaching methods (spiritual teaching and life application) and classroom management.

The command is clear: God's chosen people must keep His word before their children. When we understand the tremendous potential God sees in our children, we will care for them as precious treasures, whose value only increases with each generation. Though religious education spans a lifetime, it is our calling to support one another, as well as the church, in working towards the goal of building up the faith of our children in the Lord. ★

Table: Seminars and Convocations

	Student Spiritual Convocation ¹	Regional High School Theological Seminar ¹	National Youth Theological Seminar ²	College Youth Spiritual Convocation ³	Young Adult Spiritual Convocation ⁴	National Adult Theological Seminar ⁵
Frequency	Semi-annual	Annual	Annual	Annual	Annual	Annual
Duration	1 week	2 weeks	2 weeks	1 week	3 days	1 week
Location	Regional	Regional	National	Regional	Regional	National
Age/Grade	Summer: E2/J1 Winter: J1/J2	J2	College	College	Young adults, aged 21–40	Adults 40 and above
Lodging	Church premises, required	Church premises, required	Church premises, required	Church premises, required	Church premises, encouraged	Church premises, required
Counselor Guidance	Yes, per group	Yes, per group	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Bible-based Assignment	Daily memory verse	Weekly assessment	Daily homework; weekly assessment	Daily homework; weekly assessment	Yes	Varies, depending on instructor
Fasting Prayer	1 meal/day encouraged	1 meal/day encouraged	at least 1 meal/day encouraged	at least 1 meal/day encouraged	at least 1 meal/day encouraged	Encouraged
Holy Communion	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

1 Participants are separated into same-gender groups, each with at least one counselor to provide guidance and spiritual support throughout the week. The counselors encourage students with the word of God to pray and to draw near to God, and lead morning Bible studies, daily discussions, and nighttime sharing within each group. Participants also have the opportunity to fellowship with members from other churches and learn about God through curriculum specifically created for their age group.

2 The curriculum is aimed at providing a deeper understanding of the Scriptures and life application teachings for college students. Participants are separated into groups for sharing and Bible study, and a team of counselors oversees all groups and marks homework. Participants must attend four years of NYTS full-time and give a twenty-minute sermon in order to graduate.

3 The curriculum is aimed at providing a deeper understanding of the Scriptures and life application teachings for college students. Participants are separated into groups for sharing and Bible study.

4 Participants are separated into groups for discussion.

5 Under the purview of the Training Department, which falls under Religious Education, even though participants no longer attend weekly RE classes.



To Rise with Wings

Based on a sermon by S. Hwang—Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

A LESSON FROM NATURE

Nature is a powerful teacher. It neither lectures nor rebukes, but demonstrates through vivid imagery the more fundamental instructions of life—including the Christian one. Here is one lesson:

A mother eagle does a curious thing to its young. Once the mother decides it is time for the young to take flight and leave the nest, it stirs up the nest, forcing the defenseless eaglets off. At first blush, it is shocking that such a harsh method is employed. But this is a momentous event for the eaglet; it is through a relentless series of these brief, alarming windows of opportunity that the flightless fledglings learn the art of flight. It is when these earth-bound eaglets free-fall towards the ground, expecting to meet their deaths, that they find maturity instead, stretching their

wings to take flight, becoming the majestic and fearsome birds of prey we know them to be.

Drawing from the richness of the Bible, we will first explore why and how God trains His chosen and beloved through the thorniest of trials.

BAPTISM OF FIRE

God uses suffering and pain to humble and train His soldiers.

Fittingly, the eagle appears to have emulated the teaching style of its (and our) Maker—God. Mankind reaches the heights of maturity the same way the eaglets do—by falling first. Inspired by God, Moses notes this comparison with clarity in Deuteronomy 32:10–12:

[The LORD] found [Israel] in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the

apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the LORD alone led him, and there was no foreign god with him.

In the mother tongue of Moses, Hebrew, the word for “establish” is *kwun*, which is alternatively translated as “prepare” or “strengthen.” Thus, when we read from Deuteronomy 32:6 that God establishes us, we understand that God is preparing us for greater things that we will accomplish for His name. Like the eaglets, our training can be abrupt, alarming, and at times, seemingly insurmountable. But we know, by His grace, resting on His wings, we will eventually stretch wings of our own and fly with an independent and mature faith.

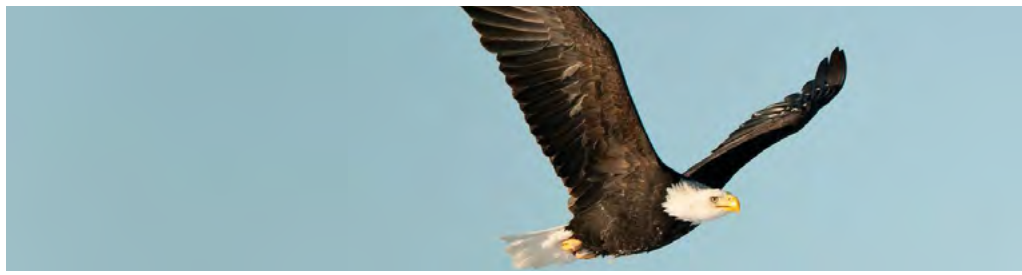
We know this not just from eagles, but from the experiences of the Israelites too. Moses and the people expected a blissful future. Indeed, God had promised them one; the promised land of Canaan awaited their arrival. The heroes of the Exodus never imagined that they would spend nearly half a century as stateless nomads,

“In fact, suffering is not just used to build faith, but also to reflect and diagnose it. When we are forced to confront troubles in our lives, we reveal the truest extent of our faith and quality of our character, allowing us to evaluate how we stand before God.”

wandering the harsh wilderness and weathering a spiritually trying series of rebellions and strife. Nevertheless, this was necessary for the Israelites to put away childish things. After forty years of witnessing first-hand the compassion and righteousness of their God, the faith of the Israelites emerged more mature than ever, finally ready to inhabit the Promised Land. After forty years, a disunited rabble of slaves emerged as a nation of faithful warriors capable of conquest and conviction in God.

THE TEST

In fact, suffering is not just used to build faith, but also to reflect and diagnose it. When we are forced to confront troubles in our lives, we reveal the truest extent of our faith and quality of our character, allowing us to evaluate how we stand before



spiritually. For instance, when you attend a church seminar and are faced with a barrage of rules and regulations, you feel severely restrictive. "After all," you think to yourself, "even if I sleep an hour after lights-out, who am I harming?" God wants to treat us as adults, to be mature in thought and in action. The rules for the seminar may not necessarily be warmly received or the best course of action. However, we comply, simply because we love God and want His church to operate

commandments or not ... that he might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD."

Understanding that suffering and toil is an inescapable part of our lives, the question we must force ourselves to confront is this: when in the depths of our suffering, what, or who, will I turn to? Contentment is a commodity that is in abundance today. From life coaches and therapists to money, the possible sources of contentment available for someone searching for meaning and comfort are endless. Alas, as we all know, these are but poor imitations of the type of satisfaction only God can give us. It is understandably difficult to maintain that God is sometimes responsible for both the troubles that come our way and the healing balm that gives us peace. Yet therein lies the truth: God desires that we turn to Him in the throes of our turmoil. He wants us to yearn for Him, and in turn, seeks to demonstrate the wonders of His hand as He grants us the fortitude and faith to weather the storms.

Most students in church training seminars are often confronted with the trying test of abstinence from food—fasting prayers are especially demanding for the inexperienced. However, it is when the physical is muted that the spiritual within us awakens. This we know from the invigorating first-hand reports of the powerful spiritual experiences students have during their fasting prayers. Brief abstinence from food is a small price to pay for being able to be intimate with one's spirit nature and with God. There is simply nothing like it.

Reading Deuteronomy 8:4–5, one can appreciate the poignancy of the

Life within and without the church walls will certainly contain problems. Some are tests, some train us, and others are opportunities for God's glory to be perfected in us.

God.

Job, one of the most impressive heroes of faith in the Old Testament, immediately comes to mind. The personal tests we may lament about today would scarcely match that of Job's. He suffered a series of horrid afflictions, designed and administered by Satan himself. Yet we also know of Job's spiritual fortitude and how he, and more importantly, his faith in God, survived all the torments he experienced. Why was the test necessary? Even if not to show the devil the spiritual caliber of God's chosen, the test was vital to Job reviewing his life of faith and understanding what it actually means to dedicate one's life to God and live as His child. It was a test for Job's friends as well, forcing them to re-examine their own flawed understanding of how human suffering fits into the plan of God.

Yes, for most of us, our trials today might seem trivial in comparison. But they are no less crucial for us to understand where we really stand

in love and harmony.

Our response to the challenges that God places on our path helps us to better understand the stage and nature of our faith. Is our faith still in its infancy, concerned only with our own well-being and interest? Is our faith too pompous and insensitive, preferring to pronounce judgment on others instead of performing frank introspection? We have to be honest with our imperfections, accepting that we can, and must, always better ourselves.

LEARNING CONTENTMENT

Training teaches us what true contentment in God is.

The early passages of Deuteronomy 8 are very revealing. "And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness," reads the commandment in verses 2 and 3 of the chapter, "to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His

point. Just like our seminary students, suffering is indeed promised. Fasting is a symbol for the many sacrifices and losses a Christian has to be prepared to go through according to God's plan. However, just as the forty years of nomadic living did not afflict the Israelites with torn clothing and swollen feet, so has God promised deliverance and strength through grace for the faithful.

FOR THE SAKE OF SERVICE

A tenacious faith does more than get us through the vicissitudes of life. It prepares the Christian for service to the church. Many well-intentioned and dedicated youths have passed through the doors of the church eager to use their talents to serve God in any ministry they are called to. Unfortunately many drop out midway. Sadder still are those who quit in tears. For many, the innumerable trials they encountered in their service to God shattered their romanticized expectations of ministry.

clear with our attitudes; life within and without the church walls will certainly contain problems. Some are tests, some train us, and others are opportunities for God's glory to be perfected in us. What we must never do is to have a false, idealistic notion of life as a Christian, understanding that grace is what God gives us to get through our problems, not get around them.

HOW JESUS TRAINED

Knowing the importance of religious education and training through trials, we now come to the practical aspects. What is the best way to train? The answer rests with the greatest of teachers: Jesus Christ. We will explore three key features of the way Jesus trained and was trained Himself.

First, Jesus' ministry began with Him being driven to the wilderness (Mk 1:13). The wilderness is an austere and uncompromising environment that forces those who wish to survive to be disciplined and focused on the

to stream video after video. It is the various small luxuries that are missing from the church that make it such a conducive environment for spiritual training. Beneath this, however, lies a greater lesson. The world has no shortage of distractions that keep us unfocused and confused over our priorities. It is our responsibility as Christians to recognize that God comes first. Furthermore, we should do more than compartmentalize time for God, as if our Christianity is suspended at other periods. Rather, we are called to have God in mind and heart at all times. That involves seizing every opportunity to train oneself spiritually and trying to see the glory of God in the little things we do every day. This is best achieved when in the church environment.

Second, Jesus resisted the temptations of the devil by fasting for forty days and nights. Fasting is a powerful way for us to set aside our fleshly vices and distractions, to focus on the spiritual. If even the Son of God knew the weakness of flesh, and therefore the need for spiritual cultivation through fasting, then we have all good reason to fast regularly for our own sakes in our life of faith.

Third, one of the first things Jesus did during the early periods of His ministry was to gather disciples. These chosen men would eventually become His closest companions, students and ambassadors, bringing the memory and legacy of Jesus to many others. "A friend loves at all times," Solomon counsels us in Proverbs 17:17, "and a brother is born for adversity." Jesus knew that His disciples needed each other to grow in faith and perform the tasks appointed to them. It is hard to be a solitary Christian; God intends for true believers to become a community, independent in personal faith to God yet united in truth. Another proverb of Solomon reminds us that iron sharpens iron. We need to study the word of God, pray, and grow in spirit together. This builds a sense of shared accountability and camaraderie, reminding us that a true faith is not a self-absorbed one, but one that cares for fellow brothers and sisters, and for one's family.

“God does not wish for us to soar that we may feel powerful, or glide that we may inspire awe. We soar because God wishes for us to see the horizon beyond. We stretch our wings and climb the winds that we may always have heaven and our salvation in our sights and minds, never forgetting where we are going, and who we must look to get there.”

They expected only bountiful grace and blessings—thinking these to be rewards for their work. But when faced with the inescapable problems of their personal lives and church work, they buckle under the weight of disappointment and resentment. Therefore, we have to be very

necessary tasks. For the purposes of training, the wilderness is the church. Almost everything that distracts us from godly training at home is absent in church. No luxurious queen-size bed to laze in. No forty-inch TV to captivate us with its glare. No high-speed broadband internet connection

TO RISE WITH WINGS

Suffering produces Christian character, allowing us to hone our virtues and learn how to rely on God. It provides us with an opportunity to reflect on our faith, examining it for frailties that most urgently require help. We should be prepared to ask both God and our brethren for guidance and healing.

Lastly, it prepares us for service in church by teaching us what true contentment is. This way, we are not disappointed and resentful when our life turns out less than perfect, because we know that Christianity is not in the business of giving us ideal, pain-free lives on earth. Instead, it provides character and hope while we are earth-bound, that we may receive the greater blessings above. In fact, we do not have to wait for life to present us with trials before we commence our training. Jesus has set out clear modes of training that we can emulate. This includes the habit of coming to church and attending church seminars for effective training, fasting, and fellowship among members of the spiritual family.

If we could speak to the towering figures of faith in the Bible and ask them how they managed to keep the faith and become role models for generations to come, what would they tell us? Would Moses recall his polished, princely upbringing in Pharaoh's courts, or his wanderings in the wilderness, where he saw first-hand the majesty of God and the importance of obedience? Would Daniel point to his education and his status as his shining moment, or his quiet but determined faith and trust in the lions' den? Surely we know the answer.

To rise with wings is not the goal itself. God does not wish for us to soar that we may feel powerful, or glide that we may inspire awe. We soar because God wishes for us to see the horizon beyond. We stretch our wings and climb the winds that we may always have heaven and our salvation in our sights and minds, never forgetting where we are going, and who we must look to get there. ★

Five Loaves and Two Fish

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Love as Brothers

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"Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble." (1 Pet 3:8 | NIV)

We are privileged to belong to God's family, a community with Jesus Christ as the founder and foundation. Everyone in this community is related - we are all brothers and sisters, loved equally by God. God teaches us to love one another. But sometimes we may feel that it is much easier to love God than to love others. It is easy to say that we love God when it doesn't cost anything more than weekly attendance at church services. But the real test of our love for God is how we treat the people in front of us - our family members and fellow believers. We cannot truly love God while neglecting to love people around us in God's family.

Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1 Jn 3:15)

Does this mean that if you dislike someone, you aren't a Christian? John's words focus on the attitude that causes us to ignore or despise others, to treat them as irritants, competitors, or enemies. Christian love is not a feeling but a choice. [Continue reading →](#)

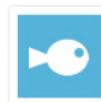
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The Practice of Love – Humility

"[Love] does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud." (1 Cor 13:4 | NIV)

Our Lord Jesus Christ commands us to love one another. What is brotherly love? It goes beyond our affection for each other, our sense of belonging, or our social group. Biblical love is not envious, proud, or self-centered. The practice of brotherly love encompasses humility.



Love does not envy. Do we bicker out of jealousy? When Jesus saw Nathanael coming, He addressed him as an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile. This is a compliment to the honesty and sincerity of Nathanael. We need to affirm the good qualities and achievements of our fellow believers. Rather than criticize each other, we should encourage and become advocates for each other. [Continue reading →](#)

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God's Preparation of Elijah

Jachin — Singapore

Usually, we spend more time preparing for the tasks we have if they are deemed important. If the task at hand is particularly difficult, our preparations will be more intense. Athletes undertake years of intensive training and strict diets before competing at the Olympic Games to ensure the best chances for them to win a medal. The same principle applies to how we prepare, and how God prepares us, to do His work. We see this principle in action in how God prepared Elijah at the Brook Cherith.

Elijah served as a prophet in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, during the dark period in history, when Ahab reigned with his wife Jezebel. The Bible describes Ahab as one who “did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him” (1 Kgs 16:30). Indeed, “there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife stirred him up” (1 Kgs 21:25). As a result of his unfaithfulness, the whole nation of Israel was led astray to worship idols. It was during these darkest of times that God called Elijah for a difficult, but important, mission—to turn the nation back to Him.

”By trusting that God would care for him while he hid by the Brook Cherith, Elijah would learn to set his mind fully on God, to trust in His providence, and to wait patiently for the word of God. This was to be both a physical and a spiritual training for Elijah.

GOD SENDS ELIJAH

The Bible introduces the prophet Elijah with these words:

And Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, except at my word.” (1 Kgs 17:1)

Elijah's appearance is abrupt and lacking in details of his background. However, his name stands out as having a special significance during a time when the worship of Baal and Asherah was widespread in Israel; Elijah means, “My God is the LORD”. Both his name and his words were a powerful proclamation of the living God. It was an especially stark message to the idolatrous society of his time.

James tells us that, true to Elijah's

God-inspired word, there was no rain in the land for three and a half years (Jas 5:17). But during this time of drought, Elijah also fell silent as a prophet to Israel and went into hiding. This may seem like an odd course of action for someone who had delivered such a bold prophecy, but this period of silence allowed for two things: firstly, after three years of drought, the truth of God's word would have been verified. Secondly, his seclusion was a period of preparation for Elijah before God used him on Mount Carmel against the prophets of Baal. This was how God trained Elijah for His work.

GOD TRAINS ELIJAH

Elijah's training began with God's command: “Get away from here and turn eastward, and hide by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. And it will be that you shall drink from

the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there" (1 Kgs 17:3–4). By trusting that God would care for him while he hid by the Brook Cherith, Elijah would learn to set his mind fully on God, to trust in His providence, and to wait patiently for the word of God. This was to be both a physical and a spiritual training for Elijah.

Training Goal 1: To Set Your Mind Fully on God

The Brook of Cherith was a place where Elijah could withdraw into isolation and focus solely on God. Though God would later provide company for Elijah in the widow of Zarephath and her son, it was important for Elijah to first be alone with God. As His servant, a strong relationship with God comes first and foremost.

Being alone also meant that, apart from God, there was no one to provide food for Elijah. Because he was in hiding, Elijah was unable to venture out to find food for himself; he had to rely fully on God. As promised, God commanded the ravens to feed Elijah at the brook (1 Kgs 17:4). In addition, there were no other distractions or activities to occupy him; all he could do was wait patiently each morning and evening for the ravens to bring bread and meat for him to eat (1 Kgs 17:6). Such an environment taught Elijah to be fully reliant on God's providence.

In our modern society, Christians face two great challenges: indifference—becoming numb to the things of God, and distraction—where your attention is divided and you cannot focus on God. There are many things in this world that can steal our attention and occupy our time.

Jesus warns us of the dangers of letting ourselves be distracted: "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly" (Lk 21:34). Carousing and drunkenness can also refer to things that are not necessarily sinful, but nevertheless cause us to be distracted from the things of God.



These could be everyday matters that occupy our minds to such an extent that we lose focus on God.

Jesus warned that the last days will be just like the days of Noah: "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Mt 24:38–39). What wrong did these people commit? We must eat and drink in order to be sustained physically, and marriage was instituted by God Himself. Therefore, in and of themselves, these are not sinful acts. For the people of Noah's time, however, these things wrongly became the entire focus of their lives.

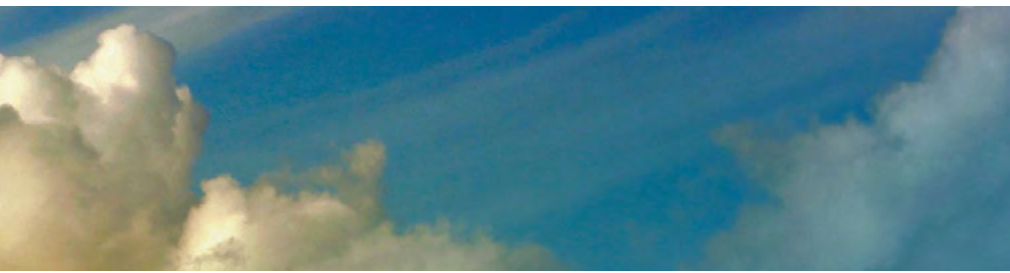
God is always able to accomplish more than we can imagine. He is able to use the lowliest things to complete His will. The lesson for us is that if God is able to provide for Elijah by the ravens and by the widow, then He can provide for us even when we can see no solution ahead.

When you take a photograph with a shallow depth of field, the subject that the camera is focused on will appear sharp. But what happens to the rest of the image? The area that is out of focus appears blurred and unclear.

When we focus all our attention on our physical needs and pleasures, we lose focus on our spiritual needs. The people of Noah's time were so preoccupied with eating, drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage that they did not realize their dire state until they were taken away by the flood. Noah's vehement warnings were like white noise to them; they became indifferent to the things of God, unaware of their impending destruction.

The Brook Cherith was the place where God wanted Elijah to bring his focus back to Him. God removed every distraction, every relationship, and the need to labor or search for sustenance, so that Elijah could concentrate on God alone. Today, God leads us to our own Brook Cherith in many ways. For example, when we attend spiritual meetings and theological courses, our physical needs are looked after and we are removed from the distractions of the world so that our indifferent hearts can return to God. Attendees of these events are even encouraged to switch off their mobile phones for the duration of the course so as to truly disconnect from the outside world.

Another example is how God allows us to meet with hardships. When faced with illnesses or job losses, we will understandably go through a period of questioning, reflection, and supplication. Eventually, we will realize that everything is in the hands of God. Our minds become clearer and our focus shifts back to Him. We begin to earnestly seek His guidance, and acknowledge the grace we have already received from Him. We may or may not regain our health or employment, but we will find that through this hardship our relationship



with God is re-established. This is how God trains us at the Brook Cherith to set our minds fully on Him.

Training Goal 2: To Fully Trust in God's Providence

The second reason that God brought Elijah to the Brook Cherith was to teach him to fully trust in God's providence. It was here that Elijah experienced the truth that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4).

God ordained that man should labor to survive, but we often become so weighed down by the "cares of this life" (Lk 21:34) that we allow our work to distract us from our relationship with God. We tell ourselves that God helps those who help themselves, so we work harder. Yet we forget that everything we have has not been gained through our own labor, but through God's grace. God brought Elijah to the brook to remind him of three truths regarding God's providence.

The first truth is that God can provide by any means; there is no limit to what God can do, or how He can do it. Here, he used ravens to feed Elijah. By nature, ravens are scavengers that would aggressively steal and fight for food. However, they miraculously provided generously for Elijah at God's command. Why would God choose the raven, considered unclean by the Jews, rather than a more esteemed creature such as the dove? It is because God does not use the things that man deems worthy, but that which is weak and despised (1 Cor 1:27), to perform His will. God showed Elijah that He was able to use the lowliest of creatures to feed him. Later, He would provide for Elijah

through a widow—widows were among the least honorable members of society because they could hardly provide for themselves. In fact, 1 Kings 17 tells us that this particular Gentile widow had only a handful of flour and some oil left, yet God was able to make use of her to feed Elijah.

Waiting for God is a training that we must all undergo. Waiting can be a difficult thing, and the longer we wait for something, the more anxious we become. Yet if we are able to wait for the Lord's time to come, then we will be truly blessed.

It is difficult to imagine that God would use the ravens and a poor widow to feed Elijah. This was also how Moses reacted when God told him that He would provide meat for the Israelites. Moses asked: "Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to provide enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to provide enough for them?" God's reply was: "Has the LORD's arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not" (Num 11:22–23). God is always able to accomplish more than we can imagine. He is able to use the lowliest things to complete His will. The lesson for us is that if God is able to provide for Elijah by the ravens and by the widow, then He can provide for us even when we can see no solution ahead.

The second truth is that God's providence always comes at the right time and in the right order. If we had been in Elijah's shoes, we would wonder, "How will the ravens feed me? When will they feed me?" We know what God has promised us,

but we are unable to fully trust in His promises because we want to know every part of God's plan before we feel secure. We allow our doubts and fears to erode our confidence in God's promise to us, pushing us to work even harder through our own methods. In Elijah's case, God's plan was revealed step by step. Only when Elijah had obeyed God and went to the Brook Cherith did he discover how the ravens would feed him, and how often (1 Kgs 17:6). And it was only when the brook had dried up that the next part of God's plan was revealed to him (1 Kgs 17:7–9).

God's providence is revealed to us one step at a time. This is how God

trains us to trust Him and believe that He will always do the right thing at the right time. When the brook had dried up, Elijah could have lost all hope in God, but it was at this point that God's word came to him. Would we have had the faith to trust that God is still in control?

Finally, Elijah learned that God's providence is always sufficient. The ravens brought food to Elijah at fixed times twice a day—no more, no less. This was just enough to sustain the prophet. Later, when Elijah was fed by the widow of Zarephath, the training would go one step further. At the brook, the ravens brought bread and meat, whereas the widow only provided bread. Through such physical training, Elijah's spirituality was enriched. By curbing his natural cravings, he could focus his attention more sharply on God.

This teaches us that we ought to be content with whatever God has given us. As Paul wrote: "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to

be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Phil 4:12). This refers to two extremes: one of abundance, and the other of poverty. The former was experienced by the Israelites when they entered the Promised Land—they became full and forgot about God (Deut 31:20). The latter is experienced by people who face tribulation; if they cannot endure, then they could fall away. These extreme situations can become a stumbling block if we are not content with our God-given lot. Therefore, whatever physical blessings we receive from God, whether they are abundant or just enough, we should learn to be like Paul and Elijah and be content with God's providence.

Training Goal 3: To Wait Patiently for the Lord

The period of drought was primarily defined by waiting. Israel was waiting for the word of God to come to pass—that rain would not fall, except at the word of Elijah. At the same time, and more pertinently, Elijah waited at the Brook Cherith for God's instructions on what to do next. Waiting was a form of training for the prophet.

The Brook Cherith was a small tributary to the River Jordan, and Elijah knew it would eventually dry up during the drought. God could have performed a great miracle and opened a spring for Elijah. Instead, He allowed the natural order of things to run its course. Elijah would have witnessed how the brook gradually became a trickle and eventually dried up. Perhaps he even measured how much the water level went down by each day. Would he have become more and more anxious as the water diminished while God's word was still yet to come? If we were in his position, would we have taken matters into our own hands and gone in search of another source of water?

The inability to wait is a common failure of God's people. This was one of the reasons Saul offered an unlawful sacrifice at Gilgal. The people had gathered to fight the Philistines, but after waiting seven days for Samuel to come and offer the sacrifice, Saul grew impatient and burnt the offering

himself, disobeying God and losing His favor in the process. Immediately after he had done this, Samuel arrived. Saul only needed to have trusted and waited a little longer.

Waiting for God is a training that we must all undergo. Waiting can be a difficult thing, and the longer we wait for something, the more anxious we become. Yet if we are able to wait for the Lord's time to come, then we will be truly blessed.

*Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you;
And therefore He will be exalted,
that He may have mercy on you.
For the LORD is a God of justice;
Blessed are all those who wait for Him. (Isa 30:18)*

“We may feel like we are the ones who are waiting for God, but in fact, God is waiting for us. He is waiting as we undergo our training to become spiritually mature.”

Often, we focus on the latter portion of this verse, but the first part is just as important. The Lord is waiting for us to be ready so that He may be gracious to us. This is especially true for those who have yet to receive the Holy Spirit. They may think, “I’ve been praying for so long; why has God not given me the Holy Spirit?” Whatever blessing from God we are seeking, we may wonder why He is making us wait so long. But have we considered that perhaps God is waiting for us?

This is like the story of a little girl whose father promised to give her a gold watch one day. She waited day after day, year after year, until she forgot all about it. Finally, on her twenty-first birthday, her father presented the watch to her, saying, “Here is the watch that I promised you. I’ve been waiting all these years for you to come of age so that I may give it to you.”

We may feel like we are the ones

who are waiting for God, but in fact, God is waiting for us. He is waiting as we undergo our training to become spiritually mature. Indeed, we may become impatient and give up, but God is willing to wait for us no matter how long it takes:

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

(2 Pet 3:8–9)

Elijah succeeded in waiting patiently for the Lord, without giving up or pursuing his own methods. When the time was ripe and the brook had dried up, God's word came to him. When the time is ripe, God does not delay. It is therefore our responsibility to always be ready to receive His grace and not give up midway.

CONCLUSION

In our life of faith, we may sometimes feel as though our prayers go unanswered, our trials are interminable, and we are just waiting for God to show us what our next step should be. We may be zealous to serve God in a greater capacity but feel frustrated when it seems that God is delaying in sending us to do His work. As the example of Elijah shows us, this may be because God has an important task in store for us and so He wishes to fully prepare us to serve Him. Just as He did with Elijah at the Brook Cherith, so will He train us to overcome indifference and distraction so that we can fully focus our minds on Him, to trust in His providence no matter how impossible the situation seems, and to wait patiently for His word no matter how long it takes. We can trust that after our period of preparation, we will be ready to perform great works for the glory of the Lord. ★



Philip Shee—Jakarta, Indonesia

The apostolic church in the first century is, rightfully, regarded as the model we should emulate as we develop our church today. Upon the downpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, the early church grew exponentially, from one hundred and twenty believers to three thousand in a day (Acts 2:1–4; 4:1). She then grew rapidly to five thousand in a very short period of time (Acts 4:4).

The church had been entrusted with the complete truth as the Holy Spirit “brought to their remembrance all things that the Lord had said to them” (Jn 14:26), and “guided them into all truth” (Jn 16:13). The Holy Spirit gave them courage to testify boldly (Acts 4:31) and empowered them to perform miracles as testimony to the truth (Acts 2:43; 3:6–9; 5:14–16). The early believers were of one heart and soul and had all things in common (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–35). Such an atmosphere in the church is encouraging and heartwarming.

However, while it is good to aspire and have the True Jesus Church (TJC) mirror all aspects of the early church, it is important to do so with a positive and mature attitude. The complete

truth of salvation has indeed been restored to the TJC, and the Holy Spirit has already been poured down as prophesied. Notwithstanding, we must recognize that the spiritual pursuit in other aspects such as love and holiness is a journey towards perfection that the church has embarked upon, rather than a goal that has easily and already been attained. Failure to appreciate this context may leave us disillusioned and disappointed when we chance upon the imperfections within the church.

DISAPPOINTED WITH HYPOCRISY?

It is understandable that we feel disappointed when we observe hypocrisy in church. After all, Jesus had often rebuked the Pharisees for their pretense and inconsistencies

between their words and actions. Paul strongly advocated that love be without hypocrisy (Rom 12:9); Paul and Timothy consistently conducted themselves in simplicity and godly sincerity among the believers (2 Cor 1:12).

Remembering these exemplars, we may become disillusioned when we observe people in church who appear insincere in their dealings. We may have observed double standards being practiced, overheard some patronizing conversations among brethren, or experienced some broken promises. Over time, we start to doubt our brethren and before long, we may end up dismissing the entire institution of the church as hypocritical. To reconcile the internal conflict in our minds, we convince ourselves that it is better to practice

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our faith alone, apart from the church.

Viewing the above encounters in context is critical in shaping our reactions. We must understand that while the church is an institution of God, she continues to be made up of people who are far from perfect; people who are at different stages of their journey of faith. Even members who are supposedly strong, such as leaders and ministers, have moments of weakness. It was no different in the apostolic church that we are seeking to model.

In Antioch, Paul confronted Peter because the latter had not been straightforward about the truth of the gospel. Peter was originally eating with the Gentiles but chose to withdraw and separate himself from them when certain men from James visited. He reacted in this manner because he was afraid that these visiting Jewish believers might not accept the Gentiles. Peter certainly did not share their views, yet his actions were inconsistent. He seemed to be keen to please man rather than upholding what was right. This was very serious as even Barnabas and



Peter's momentary weakness was not used to evaluate the integrity of the entire institution of the apostolic church. Therefore, let us not allow our encounter with individual hypocrisy in church lead us to write off the integrity of the entire church.

HURT BY JUDGEMENT?

We may occasionally hear unhappy believers lament that the church has no love. Such sentiments often arise when we feel that some of our unconventional choices are frowned upon by others in church. These may range from views we hold, to habits we have, the way we dress, the hairstyle we don, or the values we uphold. Feeling victimized, we distance ourselves from the church.

greatest over faith and hope (1 Cor 13:13), and encouragement for the church to "pursue love" (1 Cor 14:1) suggest that even the early church was not yet perfect in love. There were "spots in their love feasts" (Jude 12). Other apostles also continued to reinforce the lessons in love. John encouraged the church to love in "deed and in truth" (1 Jn 3:18). Peter, after writing many topics to the believers located in various places, reminded them, "above all things have fervent love for one another" (1 Pet 4:8). The key to rise above our bitterness is to recognize that the lesson in love cannot be mastered overnight. It is a lifelong pursuit for individuals and also the church as a whole. Hence, it should not surprise us to see imperfect manifestation of love in church.

However, if we look around us objectively, we would agree that we do see a fair amount of love and kindness among brethren and also among workers. Is it not love that takes not just one, but many of our missionaries and volunteer workers repeatedly to developing countries across the world? Is it not love that motivates our ministers and believers to tirelessly visit the sick and those in need? Is it not love that inspires our youths to care for their students in the religious education classes? Is it not love that keeps our ministers awake as they pray in tears for backsliding believers? The list is endless.

Undeniably, there are pockets of lapses in love. But to generalize and conclude that the church is devoid of love by focusing solely on the lapses and turning a blind eye to the many other positives appears to be an unfair judgment in itself. Such selective retention of negative observations

Let us not allow our encounter with individual hypocrisy in church lead us to write off the integrity of the entire church.

the rest of the Jews were affected and played the hypocrite with him (Gal 2:11–14).

As a leader, Peter's weakness in this instance could have dealt a heavy blow to the Gentiles in the church, or to other co-workers who looked up to him. This was the same Peter who denied Jesus three times despite having professed that he was ready to go to prison and even to die with Christ (Lk 22:33, 56–62). Notwithstanding these incidents, most will agree that, on balance, Peter's inconsistency and lapses were merely a reflection of his momentary human weakness rather than conclusive evidence of his character as an incorrigible hypocrite. More importantly, although he was a pillar of the church (Gal 2:9),

This may gradually deteriorate into complete disengagement as we convince ourselves that no one in church understands us and no one bothers to do so.

Such a situation may be exacerbated by the presence of others who share the same sentiments. Instead of helping one another break free from this dangerous downward spiral, we end up entrenching each other in bitterness. As we fan the fire of discontentment by piling our negative experiences on one another, we feel vindicated. But before long, our bitterness multiplies and becomes a collective conviction that the church is prejudiced, cold, and devoid of the love she espouses.

Paul's recognition that love is the



will only increase our bitterness. This is neither helpful to the situation nor good for our spiritual wellbeing.

Keeping track of such negative examples is likely to make us feel even more justified in our disappointment with the church which, in turn, may lead to the unintended consequence of righteousness in our own eyes. Unknowingly, we may become stumbling blocks when we inadvertently influence others with our negative sentiments. Further posting our unhappiness on social media may result in an unfair, negative impression of the church created among our uninformed, non-believing friends reading our posts.

Very broadly, such a lack of discretion was also displayed by the Corinthian church when they raised their complaints against each other before unbelievers, earning a rebuke from Paul (1 Cor 6:1–8). If our love indeed surpasses others, why would we do something that could harm the church, which comprises many other innocent members trying their best to be good Christians? The Book of Proverbs provides a wise teaching for us in this regard, "The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands" (Prov 14:1). If we indeed have love and see ourselves as part of the church, the household of God, our reaction to any shortcomings we observe should not be one of condemnation from the outside. Rather, it is much more productive to take the lead to love from the inside.

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, forgiving one another, if

anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which you were called in one body; and be thankful.

(Col 3:12–15)

Based on this Pauline instruction, consider our reaction to the observed lapses of love in church. Is our reaction a manifestation of mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, and long suffering? Are we bearing with others and have we forgiven them? Have we let the peace of God rule in our hearts, or have we given our hearts over to anger, bitterness or coldness?

DISGRUNTLED BY INJUSTICE?

There are times when the church has to exercise her authority to discipline erring workers or members who have crossed the line of fundamental requirements in the Bible. Some workers may be removed from office and others may even be excommunicated. At such unfortunate times, we often encounter members who may feel the church has either been overly harsh or has dealt without sufficient justice. Such sentiments may

are capable of all that wrongdoing. After all, we have seen the good side of these individuals. Such initial reactions of disbelief or perhaps even indignation are understandable.

However, it is important to make a clear distinction between personal relationships and spiritual obligations to defend the truth and the sanctity of the church. The Bible has many examples of such dilemmas. When Moses saw that the people were unrestrained over the incident of the golden calf, he had to take the very painful decision to make a distinction. He asked those on the Lord's side to go over to him before unleashing the Lord's wrath on the unrepentant, resulting in the death of three thousand. This preserved the people of God, all of whom would otherwise have been destroyed. Moses was clearly not "trigger happy" as his pain could be seen from his plea with God to forgive the rest (Ex 32:21–35). Likewise, over the rebellion led by Korah, Moses was initially saddened and fell on his face (Num 16:1–4). But when Korah and his gang remained defiant and even influenced the entire congregation, God instructed Moses and Aaron to separate from them in order for the Lord to consume all of them. Upon the intercession of Moses and Aaron, God gave the congregation another chance by instructing them to get away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Had they not done so, they would have perished with them and the two hundred and fifty who stood by them (Num 16:19–35).

The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim 3:15); she has been entrusted with the responsibility

”*The key to rise above our bitterness is to recognize that the lesson in love cannot be mastered overnight. It is a lifelong pursuit for individuals and also the church as a whole. Hence, it should not surprise us to see imperfect manifestation of love in church.*

be colored by personal relationships with the individuals; we may find it difficult to believe that our dear friends

of preserving and propagating the truth. Hence there can be no room for heretics within to spread false

teachings to confuse members and draw them away from the grace of God. For this reason, Paul named Hymenaeus and Alexander whom he had “delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim 1:18–20), warned believers to “shun Hymenaeus and Philetus on account of their cancerous message” (2 Tim 2:15–18) and also to “withdraw from people who do not consent to wholesome words, the words of our Lord Jesus and to the doctrine which accords with godliness” (1 Tim 6:3–5).

The sanctity of the church also cannot be compromised by allowing unholy or immoral workers to remain in service. Paul even went to the extent of telling us not to keep company, and not even to eat with

It is clear from Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians that the church is not the place for insubordinate mavericks to promote their individualism and create disorder and chaos. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians to “withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us” (2 Thess 3:6). Paul had also instructed Titus to “reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition” (Tit 3:10). Hence, if there are workers or members who operate as insubordinate mavericks with no regard for the wider church as an institution, even after repeated admonition, then we may have little choice except to exercise church discipline (Mt 18:15–17).

institution from the outside. In the secular world, we often hear working people remark, “the firm doesn't care” or “the management doesn't care” when these people are actually part of the firm or even the management themselves. When asked who the firm is or who the management is, they are often dumbfounded. On further query, the issue causing unhappiness can often be narrowed down to a few individuals with whom they have a personal issue.

The tendency to generalize from the individual to the institution is probably also reflective of our dissatisfaction with the church. We may unwittingly conclude that the church is hypocritical, unloving, or unjust as a result of some church developments we disagree with, or some members we are unhappy with. But have we considered that we are very much part of the church herself? Running away and criticizing from outside will neither resolve our situation nor improve the church. The optimal way is for us to pursue love, justice, and truth together with the church at large, since we share this common journey.

There is no need to be a troubled sheep away from the fold. There are still many other lovely sheep who are kind, meek, and full of love within the fold. There are still many shepherds who love and care for the sheep within the fold. These same shepherds continue to pray and hope that the wandering sheep away from the fold will be able to iron out the turmoil in their hearts and break free from their negative spiral of bitterness. With love and longsuffering, the shepherds will continue to call, praying that these sheep will return in peace to the fold. ★

“If we indeed have love and see ourselves as part of the church, the household of God, our reaction to any shortcomings we observe should not be one of condemnation from the outside. Rather, it is much more productive to take the lead to love from the inside.”

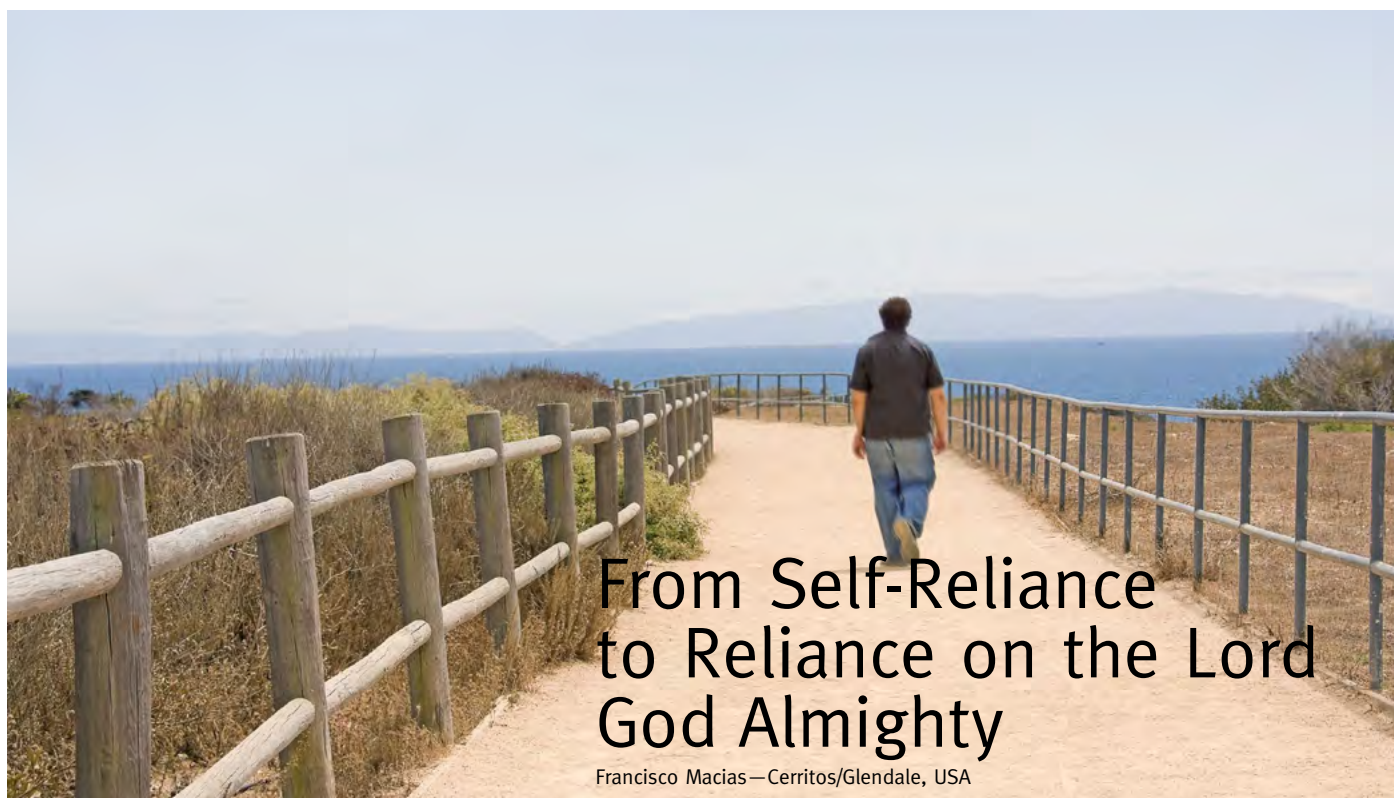
a brother who is sexually immoral, covetous, or an idolator, a reviler, a drunkard or an extortioner. He further tells us to purge the evil person from amongst us (1 Cor 5:9–13). Paul's stand was due to his concern for the wider church as he recognized that “a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1 Cor 5:6–7). This is also aligned with John's teaching that we “should not even pray for those who have committed sins leading to death” (1 Jn 5:16).

The church, being God's institution, is a place of order. Paul pointed out to the Corinthians, that “God is not the author of confusion, or disorder” (1 Cor 14:33) and instructed them to “let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40). This was particularly apt for the Corinthian church as the members were full of themselves, each believing themselves to be superior to others. They were individualistic, divisive and not submissive to the church as an institution.

In all the above examples, the key is to recognize the full context of Christian love. While forgiveness and forbearance is clearly a key component (Col 3:12–14), we must also recognize that love “does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth” (1 Cor 13:6). There is clear biblical basis for church discipline. For us to conclude that exercising church discipline demonstrates a lack of love or justice is probably, in itself, a harsh judgment we have made on the church. Exercising church discipline is a very sad and painful experience which no one enjoys. In fact it is much easier for leaders in the church to play “Mr. Nice Guy.” However, doing so would be irresponsible, unjust, and unloving as we subject the wider church to potential harm, while not necessarily helping the errant to repent.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

It is not uncommon to see people distance themselves from institutions they belong to and criticize the



From Self-Reliance to Reliance on the Lord God Almighty

Francisco Macias—Cerritos/Glendale, USA

First of all, I thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for the honor and privilege of sharing with you His great mercy, power, and glory.

Sharing a testimony can be challenging; we can sometimes be self-absorbed and self-centered. We may even present ourselves as victims rescued by Christ rather than as guilty culprits restored by Christ. The tendency to focus on and talk about ourselves in a favorable light—glorifying ourselves instead of God—is something we must always be wary of when bearing testimony for the Lord.

MY EARLY YEARS

I was born and raised in Mexico; life was quite difficult, especially for my single mother. Raised as a Catholic, I had catechism classes, which I did not pay much attention to, and I only attended church for special occasions. As a result, I was not familiar with God's word.

When I was twenty, my mother passed away, leaving my two brothers and me in the care of my mother's youngest sister. Life became even tougher for us and I had to work and study at the same time to help my

aunt, who also had a daughter to support.

That was when everything in my life changed. I had the reputation of being a “good guy,” but in a matter of months, I started drinking, smoking, lying, and going home late, especially on weekends. Then people thought of me as that “poor young guy”—they mistakenly thought I was a victim. On the contrary, my mother's passing allowed me to do whatever I had always wanted to. Without a strong figure of authority keeping me in check, I could live as I pleased. I was not a victim, but a guilty culprit, manifesting my true colors.

Over the course of a decade, my relationship with my aunt, cousin, and brothers deteriorated until one day, we had an explosive argument. I was so angry, disillusioned, and fed up with my life in Mexico that I left

everything I had ever known and headed for the US with the intent of finding a new life in Canada.

EARLY ENCOUNTERS WITH LORD JESUS AND HIS TRUTH

However, I ended up working in southern California. Not long afterwards, a member of the True Jesus Church (TJC) started working at the same place. She spoke some basic Spanish and invited me to church. I accepted out of curiosity since I did not know much about Christianity. My first impression was that the church was plain and bare, full of people who did not think or look like me. I asked myself, “What am I doing here?” Nonetheless, I continued attending services with the believer who had first invited me.

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the Catholic Church in Mexico, I had been told that praying in tongues was only a gift of the Holy Spirit. Thus, I thought only a few would pray in tongues. To my surprise, however, almost the entire congregation was doing so.

HARD-HEADED & HARD-HEARTED; LEARNING THE HARD WAY

Over a year later, the believer who had first invited me to church left the US to work abroad. Eventually, I stopped attending services at TJC; instead, I visited other churches, but I always felt something was missing despite their good teachings.

Years passed and I was fairly content with my life. Then one day, while working in construction, I fell from the second floor. With a beam breaking my fall, I survived unscathed. About a month later, I fell down a skylight and survived that too without any significant injuries. That got me thinking about God again, but not for long

Then in 2005, I saw blood in my urine. Worryingly, the problem did not go away. Anxious and afraid, I consulted a doctor. Being diagnosed with bladder cancer completely stunned me—I felt that my life was over. Yet somehow I also felt that there was still hope, and that hope made me turn to God. I pleaded, “If you really exist, please help me.” I had no choice but to surrender myself to the Lord God Almighty.

Within a week after this shocking, life-altering news, I attended services again at TJC, and by God’s amazing grace and mercy, I received baptism. Praise the Lord, everything went smoothly: the cancerous tumor was surgically removed and I had check-ups every three months.

In spite of all this, I remained unchanged—still an egocentric sinner, reverting to my old ways and relying solely on myself. I attended services on Monday and Friday evenings, but worked Saturdays because I did not think that keeping the Sabbath was important.

About a year after my baptism, the believer who had first invited me to

church returned to the US, and a year and a half later, we got married. God had blessed me with a beautiful wife and marriage, but I still continued having many difficulties and struggles.

In 2009, during a routine check-up, the urologist told me that he saw a tumor, which needed to be surgically

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removed. The news shook me up, but my wife encouraged me to rely on God in prayer and to get a second and third opinion.

After a month of intercessory prayers and consultations, I settled on a different urologist. During the pre-operation exam, he looked troubled and kept shaking his head. Afterwards, he told us to wait in another room. Meanwhile, my wife and I prayed earnestly. When the doctor finally entered, he incredulously said, “I looked and looked, but didn’t see any tumors.” We joyfully left, praising God with gratitude. You would think that after experiencing such a miracle, I would have completely turned over a new leaf, but no! Stubbornly and foolishly, I clung to some of my old ways.

It wasn’t until 2010, when God gave us the awe-inspiring privilege of parenthood that I truly started to submit to God and rely more on Him than on myself. It was then that I stopped making excuses for not keeping the Sabbath. I realized that I had been pleasing myself, and worst

of all, lying to God, merely obeying Him at my own convenience.

Every birth is a miracle, especially one with complications like the birth of our first child. Praise God she was born healthy, despite frightening odds. Seeing the frailty of human life and the suffering my wife endured

spurred me to heed God more seriously.

DRAWING CLOSER TO LORD JESUS

Since 2011, I have had the privilege of being involved with church visitations in the Dominican Republic (DR). Serving the Lord is a humbling experience; I felt ill-equipped since I had not yet received the Holy Spirit. Despite this, I relied on Lord Jesus and volunteered as often as possible.

In 2012, a tumor was discovered in my bladder. Praise the Lord that the biopsy showed it had neither taken root nor spread to other parts of the body. Thank God it was removed quickly and painlessly. Plus, I didn’t have to take any additional time off from work.

In late 2013, I was offered the responsibility of helping with the church construction in the DR, which would take about six months. Though I had initially agreed, I began to have second thoughts about being away for such a long time, especially since my wife had just given birth to our





second child. While the ministers in charge of the project encountered delays, I secretly hoped they would forget about me.

The ministers eventually contacted me in early 2014 and asked if I was ready to go to the DR the following month. To do so, I had to quit my job and leave my family. My anxieties almost got the better of me and I nearly backed out, but my wife reassured me with her unwavering faith that God would take care of our family. After putting the matter in God's hands through prayer and with my wife's support, I mustered the courage to go.

In the DR, I had countless opportunities to share about Jesus and His truth with many people, which shamefully made me realize that I didn't really know that much myself! I had to constantly search the Scriptures to find the answers to all their questions as well as my own.

By speaking to people on the streets and studying the Bible day after day, I learned more about our faith and how to share and defend it. The believers there also helped me address the many questions I could not answer. Although we shared the gospel with surrounding neighbors, nobody came to believe. Initially, I got upset and frustrated with the apparent lack of results.

Then it dawned on me that I used to be just like those neighbors—rejecting God, unwilling to admit how sinful we are, and not wanting to rely on Him. This realization sparked a change in my prayers and prompted me to fast and pray, out of a desperate need for God's guidance, wisdom, and the courage to share His truth. Each day, I would ask God to reveal His will—where to go, who to talk to, what to

do and say. I thank God for enabling me to share His word with whomever I encountered on the street for a few hours each day after work.

RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

I came across numerous questions about our faith during that time in the DR, but whenever asked about the Holy Spirit, I became nervous and uneasy. How could I give an answer when I myself had not received the Holy Spirit? Nonetheless, the questions encouraged me all the more to pray for God's will to be done and for me to be equipped for His service.

After being in the DR for over five months, my return to the US was delayed by a month due to a couple of unforeseen circumstances, one of which was to interpret for the next visiting preacher. Before his arrival, I had a couple of weeks to think, reflect, and pray.

A little less than two years prior to this point in time, I had the first of three related dreams: While at an outdoor church service, I received the Holy Spirit during the prayer. It was so real that I felt very happy. Alas, it was only a dream.

Within a year of the first dream, I had the second one. This time, I was attending a service inside the church. While praying, I suddenly started speaking in tongues. Of course I rejoiced upon receiving the Holy Spirit, but again it was just a dream.

The third dream occurred during my extended stay in the DR. However, my reaction was significantly different from the previous two. I dreamt that I was inside the church and when I knelt down to pray, I started speaking in tongues. Weeping and pleading with God for His forgiveness and mercy, I could only see myself as a sinner—

arrogant, cowardly, disobedient, and self-centered. I then realized that in my previous dreams, I had desired the Holy Spirit for selfish reasons rather than for surrendering myself to God.

A couple of days after this third dream, I prayed to God to direct my footsteps. As soon as I felt my tongue start to move on its own, I stopped praying. I could not believe that I had truly received the Holy Spirit! At first, I thought I was only imagining my tongue moving, so the next few times I prayed by deliberately repeating, "Hallelujah" very softly so that my tongue would not move freely.

When the preacher finally arrived, we prayed together. Afterwards, he immediately asked, "When did you receive the Holy Spirit?" By confirming that I indeed had received the Holy Spirit, my doubts disappeared and I was inexpressibly grateful to God for granting me His precious Spirit.

As in my dream, I felt so unworthy of God's love and mercy that I was moved to tears. I asked, "How could you grant Your Holy Spirit to such an undeserving sinner like me?" I recalled how God had shown me tremendous love throughout my life.

Previously, I had only been praying to receive blessings for my own benefit, but did I truly believe, obey, surrender, or have faith in Him? What had I done with my life but wasted a good portion of it? I realize now that God does not need me—I need God! I love Him because He first loved me, and the best way I can show my gratitude is by denying myself and taking up the cross to travel on the path that God has allotted for me.

Being baptized and having received the Holy Spirit are just the beginning of my journey with Christ. I am still a work-in-progress, in need of God's forgiveness every day, and I ask for mercy and sanctification, to grow in His likeness. As Apostle Paul says in Philippians 2:12, "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling." ★



The True Jesus Church in Continental Europe

European Coordination Centre

HISTORY

Evangelism in Continental Europe began in 1979 when three young True Jesus Church (TJC) members from Taiwan went to Germany to study. Chia-Ming Wu, Ching-Wen Tu and Hong-Hsiung Ko initially observed the Sabbath together in Stuttgart but later moved to Heidelberg. This small group grew as more TJC youths from Taiwan went to further their studies in Germany. Gradually, they were joined by friends who came to know God from attending their Bible studies and Sabbath services.

In time, church activities spread to more places in Germany, France, Austria, and Switzerland. The first spiritual convocation was held in Heidelberg, Germany in 1980. A few years later, other places of worship also held spiritual convocations and conducted water baptism. These activities were always supported by preachers and members from Taiwan.

In 1982, with the generous support of the churches in Taiwan, the believers in Heidelberg purchased an apartment. This enabled them to have Bible studies and Sabbath services regularly. Three years later, Heidelberg officially became a house of prayer.

Through the guidance of God and believers' supplication, more houses of prayer have since been established in Salzburg, Hamburg, Paris, and Rhineland.



Spiritual convocation in Heidelberg (December 2015)

CURRENT SITUATION

Formation of European Coordination Center

Until 2014, the churches in Continental Europe—as is typical of pioneering regions—were part of the International Assembly's (IA) directed churches. However, after the churches in the German-speaking countries as well as in France had been firmly established, IA officially announced the setting up of the European Coordination Center (ECC) in 2015.

Places that are officially part of the ECC are:

- Germany: Hamburg and Rhineland (who have their own church buildings) and Heidelberg (where a residential apartment functions as church premises).
- Austria: Salzburg (a shop has been purchased for use as service venue) and Vienna (service point).
- France: Paris (residential apartment).



Houses of prayers and places of worship in Continental Europe, which are under the care of the ECC.



Church dedication in Hamburg, May 2012



Members at Salzburg House of Prayer



Members in Vienna

Brethren at other Locations

There are a number of brothers and sisters working at different places in Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. These believers either conduct their own family services or travel to attend services at places where there are churches or houses of prayer. The current membership of ECC churches is 176.

In recent years brethren, primarily from Fuzhou, China, have been emigrating to Spain, Italy, and Greece for work. By God's grace, these brethren are now able to have regular worship services. These new places of worship are under the direct care of the International Assembly, but a German care team supports them by traveling to Spain and Italy on a regular basis to help conduct Sabbath services.

Country	Number of Members
Germany	91
France	41
Austria	24
Switzerland, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway	20
Italy	87
Spain	90

Source: ECC

Current Activities

In the past decades, the places of worship under ECC underwent a major transformation. Many places have progressed from family services conducted in members' houses to proper worship services in their own church building. In the beginning, worship services consisted of Bible studies or listening to sermon tapes/ watching sermon videos; today, each place has its own organizational structure. There are church board members, religious education teachers, and members who take care of the general affairs such as cooking.

Sabbath Services: These are usually held from Saturday morning until late afternoon, including Religious Education classes, prayer session, and lunch. Many places of worship have Bible studies on Friday evenings.

Spiritual Convocation (Local Church): All ECC places of worship regularly conduct spiritual convocations. Each region holds its spiritual convocation at a different time during the year so that all the believers are able to attend one to two convocations every year and partake the Holy Communion. Since some members live a fair distance away from the nearest place of worship, spiritual convocations are held during weekends or public holidays.

Spiritual Convocation (Continental Europe): Apart from these regional spiritual convocations, there is a spiritual convocation for the whole of Continental Europe at every year end, attended by members from countries under ECC, as well as from Asia and the United States. IA and UKGA send preachers to assist in these spiritual convocations.

Special Convocations: These are tailored to suit the needs of particular groups of believers. For example, there is an annual children's spiritual convocation, which Heidelberg and Hamburg house of prayer take turns to host annually. The aim of this convocation is to allow children from different churches to meet each



other more often and to deepen their biblical knowledge.

Youth Fellowship Seminar: Since 2013, Heidelberg and Hamburg have also been conducting youth fellowship seminars. These have seen a dramatic increase in the number of participants every year. Apart from lessons, activities are conducted to enable the participants to get to know each other better and to strengthen their sense of belonging.

Special services: Whenever preachers from the UK, USA or Taiwan conduct pastoral visits, special services are held. The purpose of these services is to evangelize, to strengthen the faith of the members or to train church board members and religious education teachers.



Children's spiritual convocation in Heidelberg 2014



Youth Fellowship in Hamburg 2015



RE Teachers' Seminar 2015 in Hamburg



Literary ministry: The ECC invests much time and energy into the creation of church publications, such as gospel pamphlets and material about our church for distribution. In addition, various teams are currently working on a new hymn book in German and the translation of Religious Education materials.

East Paris Prayer House

In 2012, after the Paris church's decision to offer employment to an IA terminated preacher, a few members started to gather elsewhere for Sabbath worship. Since 2014, preachers from abroad have assisted in conducting two spiritual convocations and one seminar annually.

Under the care and guidance of the Lord, the East Paris Prayer House was recognized by the IA and officially registered in May 2015. There are currently forty-one members and two RE classes. Services are held weekly from 11:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., followed by Youth Fellowship which ends at 6:00 p.m.

Presently, East Paris Prayer House is raising funds and searching for a chapel. They require the faithful intercession of the whole TJC.



Members at East Paris Prayer House

OUTLOOK

Going forward, there are a number of important objectives for the churches under ECC.

Preaching

In the past few years, brethren at several locations have purchased and renovated church buildings or apartments for worship. Much time and energy have been spent on these matters as there were often problems that only God could solve. With most of these tasks now completed, there is a need to refocus on preaching the gospel to the world, particularly to the local people in Europe. Only then can the gospel be spread further in this part of the world.

The church needs to have members who are able to preach the word of God on the pulpit to edify the church as well as share the good news with strangers to bring them to Christ. Currently, the entire Continental Europe region only



has a single full-time preacher for the German-speaking region, who is often deployed to other parts of the world to support the work of God. Although the United Kingdom General Assembly does send UK preachers to assist, it is vital for Continental Europe to train more members, especially its youths, to sermonize and to evangelize. By God's grace, there will be members who will offer themselves to be full-time ministers in the future.

Strengthening

Another important task is to help the members in the Southern European countries, such as Italy and Spain, to establish the local church. Many of the members there have to work 24/7 for a meager income. Hence they have little time and energy left to serve God. However, these places are like young sprouts. If we provide as much support as possible and help them to grow, they will one day become great and strong churches, able to glorify God.

With God's guidance, the ECC will be able to overcome these challenges and preach the gospel to all corners of Europe. Intercessory prayers from worldwide TJC brethren are greatly needed. We look forward to welcoming you here in Europe one day. ★



Church dedication in Rhineland, May 2015



On the Front Line (III): Knowing and Serving Our Commander

Adapted from lectures by Vuthy Nol-Mantia—Dallas, USA

There are several prerequisites we must have in order to fight effectively on the front line. First, we must clearly understand and establish our identity as soldiers of Christ. Second, we need to understand the formidable enemy we face. In this final installment, we focus on how we can better know and serve our mighty Commander.

NOT BY MIGHT NOR BY POWER

The simplistic storyline in many action movies is about how the lone tough and courageous hero ultimately overcomes all odds and enemies, almost single-handedly saving his people and country. However, it does not work this way in real life. Overcoming difficulties and winning battles often result from collective effort. All the more, when we fight on the spiritual front line, we do not “wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12), it would be certain disaster and death if we were to trust and rely only on ourselves. The human fighting spirit—no matter how valiant—does not suffice; we must be filled with the Spirit of God.

However, even as we strive, Satan is working tirelessly to deceive the soldiers of Christ. In order to protect ourselves from his deception, we

must have the mind of Christ. Try as we may to have the mind of Christ, setting ourselves resolutions to be closer to God, Satan will do even more to dissuade us. He will tempt us with secular attractions and appointments, occupying us so fully that we seem to have little time left for God. For example, immediately after a spiritual convocation or church camp, when we feel spiritually-recharged, we enthusiastically set ourselves a target of waking up early to pray for an hour. However, when we want to actually implement it, we find that things crop up. Either we oversleep or we get a call from friends to meet. Then over time, the initial resolve to have a longer and deeper communication with God wanes and disappears.

UNDERSTANDING GOD THROUGH A HUMAN LENS IS IMPOSSIBLE

Another weakness of man that Satan exploits is man's desire to dissect God and understand who He is in our own limited ways. This is tantamount

to trying to bring God down from heaven. The danger of adopting this rationalist approach to our faith often means that if we cannot understand God, our faith falls apart.

The Bible—God's revelation of Himself—is very clear about God's nature and His love. However, with natural human curiosity and logic, we can think of many other questions about God which appear unanswerable. The Scriptures remind us that, “[the] secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut 29:29). This means there are things about God that we will not be able to understand because of our limited human minds. Let us just consider this: if we were indeed able to know everything about God, would we not be equal to or even superior to God?

To reiterate, God is not a specimen that we can put under the microscope and can understand with our human

intellect. For example, the Bible may tell us that “God’s eyes are upon us” (Ps 33:18) or that “the Lord regretted [His actions]” (Gen 6:6). We should not interpret the former literally as evidence that God’s eyes function like ours. Nor try to imagine or speculate about what God’s eyes are like. In the latter example, we should not infer from God’s regret that He can make mistakes, and is thus “imperfect.” As another example, God describes Himself as a jealous God (Ex 20:5, 34:14). It would be wrong to interpret His feelings as the same type of corrosive jealousy that human beings feel.

In essence, we need to have a strong simple faith as our foundation. We must thoroughly know our basic beliefs and what we have to do in order to be saved. It is good to also be thoughtful and analytical about our doctrines and know the Bible very well. After all, the word of God is a double-edged sword (Heb 4:12), which can help us battle on the evangelism front line. But do not fall prey to Satan’s temptation to view God through the human lens.

UNDERSTANDING OUR COMMANDER ON HIS TERMS

There are, however, several things that our God does want us to understand about Him.

He Is an Awesome God Who Surpasses All Things

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. (Isa 6:1)

This verse depicts two contrasting kings. One was King Uzziah—an earthly king who died. The other was the LORD, the glorious king who will never die. This is the almighty God we worship and serve today. He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, whose throne is high and lifted up far above puny man. Yet He is willing to reveal Himself to us (Jn 14:9) and to first love us. We are blessed indeed.

If we want to know more about Him, we must enter through the

“In his vision, Elder John saw God sitting on His throne of judgment. But there was also a rainbow around the throne (Rev 4:3); a sign of God’s grace, mercy, and love (Gen 9:13–16). Our God is loving and merciful but is also just.

door that He opens (Rev 4:1–2). On four occasions listed in the Book of Revelation, Elder John was in the Spirit of the Lord. And each time, God revealed great things to him. Hence, the best way to know God is to be in the Spirit, i.e., by praying and reading His word.

Elder John also saw a throne set in heaven, and One (the King), sat on the throne, a throne of judgment. This is a reminder to us to be careful and always reverent towards our almighty and awesome God. Importantly, when we serve God in church, we do not elevate ourselves to the throne. There can only be ONE on the throne, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

He Is a Just and Holy God

Many people like to believe that God is love and thus He will save everyone. Regrettably, these people have overlooked the other aspects of God, namely, that God is holy and just. If God was not just, He could have just declared Adam and Eve to have been forgiven when they sinned. However, because God is just, if man wants to be forgiven, he needs to be redeemed.

In His love, He became the atoning sacrifice for our sin. However, in response to His initiative, we need to demonstrate that action of faith through our willingness to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, and our resolution to lead a sanctified life. Many Christians today have the misconception that God is love and everyone can be saved. They do not or are not willing to see the other side—God’s justice.

In his vision, Elder John saw God sitting on His throne of judgment. But there was also a rainbow around the throne (Rev 4:3); a sign of God’s grace, mercy, and love (Gen 9:13–16). Our God is loving and merciful but is

also just. Do not think that we can keep sinning against God because the loving Father will forgive us infinitely; we will definitely have to bear the punishment!

If we have erred and are punished, we ought to rejoice and praise God because He chastises those whom He loves. But if nothing bad happens to us, perhaps God has already given up on us and is just allowing us to pursue our sinful desires. God forgave David after he sinned, but God also punished David. David’s four children died, his kingdom was split, and he had no peace in his old age. When we have transgressed, let us quickly pray for forgiveness and turn back.

BECOMING THE SOLDIER THAT GOD WANTS US TO BE

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” Then I said, “Here am I! Send me. (Isa 6:8)

Good soldiers must strive to be soldiers suitable for the Commander’s deployment. The prophet Isaiah was already serving God. But such a question from God to him indicates that Isaiah was not yet the soldier God wanted. So what was still missing from Isaiah’s service and service attitude? What needed renewing?

Know that Service to the Lord Is Eternal

In Isaiah 6:1, Isaiah highlighted the contrast between God and other, earthly kings. On the one hand was King Uzziah—an earthly king who died. On the other hand is the LORD—heavenly king, and the almighty God who will never die. Serving earthly masters well may earn us recognition and benefit. However, when these secular individuals or



institutions pass away, so would our privileges; any glory from academic and career excellence we enjoy today is also transient.

In contrast, God is eternal. His surpassing glory fills the heavens and the earth (Isa 6:1, 3; Hab 3). Not only is it an unmitigated honor to serve Him, any service we render to Him, even the smallest or most menial, has eternal value. In the busyness of our lives in this world, we must always remember who our true and most worthy Master is and what work is most needful and deserving of priority. Remembering this will compel us to volunteer boldly for the front line.

Motivated by the Love of God

Recognizing what an extreme privilege it is to be called to serve the Lord God is the first step. Just as important is keeping the flame of such zeal to serve alive. During a war, there may be soldiers who lose motivation; they end up deserting the army. Understanding how much our Savior loves us will drive us to courageously fight, and faithfully remain, for Him on the front line. In fact, such burning zeal for Him will give us extraordinary courage.

After God gave the Ten Commandments to His chosen people, He also gave them the law concerning servants. A Hebrew servant who is bought has to serve six years; his master then has to freely release him in the seventh (Ex 21:2). However, this servant has the option of remaining with his master (Ex 21:5) if he realizes how wonderful his master is.

The Old Testament servant who chose to remain with his master had to undertake a physical and

permanent commitment. His ear was pierced as the sign of the agreement, the covenant, between him and his master (Ex 21:6). The Lord Jesus left us an excellent example in this respect. Knowing that obedience pleased His Father more than sacrifice, Jesus was determined to do His Father's will and keep the latter's law within His heart (Ps 40:6–8; Lk 2:49; Jn 4:34, 6:38).

When we were baptized, we made a covenant with the Lord Jesus. We pierced our hearts and made a commitment to serve Him for life. We were willing to make such a commitment because we know that He first loved us (2 Cor 5:14–15). Although He is the almighty Creator and we are far beneath Him, He loved us enough to come to this world, suffer and finally die for us. Remembering this always will motivate us to love Him in return and give us strength to continue battling on the front line. If we try to serve God without truly loving Him, we will not have the strength to persevere through adversity.

Emulate the Seraphim

Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. (Isa 6:2)

COVER FACES WITH WINGS

As humans, we like appreciation, especially when we have put in a lot of effort. Hence, on occasion, when we are working hard for God, we may be tempted to want others to know about our effort. At these moments, we must emulate the seraphim. Their faces would have been glorious and beautiful. But even so, they covered their faces. They neither promoted themselves nor their work. Their service was completely God-centric.

Satan was a stark contrast (Ezek 28:11–13). He was so beautiful that God said he had the seal of perfection. But he did not cover his face. The word “I” featured prominently in his existence and service; his overweening pride in his attributes and achievements ultimately led to his downfall (Isa 14:12–15).

As workers of God, we must be ever careful not to let God's abidance with us lead us to pride. Imagine we had performed miracles such as Peter and Paul had—our shadows and the handkerchief we use could heal the sick. Imagine that—like Elijah—our prayer had brought down fire from heaven. Would we be able to avoid feeling that small sense of satisfaction that we did it? As ministers, when we lay hands and scores (if not hundreds) of people receive the Holy Spirit, are we tempted to feel vindicated that God has chosen to perform such mighty works through us? Do the visions that we see make us feel that we are an elite group to whom God gives special gifts and revelation?

To avoid Satan's folly and fate, we must have the mind of Christ (Phil 2:7–10). Jesus was God Himself. But He made Himself a weak and lowly man. Despite being in the flesh, He overcame the temptations that Satan

“Not only is it an unmitigated honor to serve God, any service we render to Him, even the smallest or most menial, has eternal value. In the busyness of our lives ..., we must always remember who our true and most worthy Master is and what work is most needful and deserving of priority. Remembering this will compel us to volunteer boldly for the front line.”



dangled before Him: the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. In particular, He humbled Himself to the point of His death on the cross.

Before we go to the front line and even as we battle there, cover up our faces.

COVER FEET WITH WINGS

The seraphim covered their feet with another two wings. In fact, angels do not have feet (nor faces) as they are spiritual beings. But God wanted to emphasize to Isaiah what He wanted to see in His servants.

Bare feet leave footprints. Good servants serve quietly and leave no mark of their presence behind (Lk 17:7–10). Paul was gifted in so many areas and labored tirelessly since the day he was called to service by the Lord, yet let us see what he says of himself.

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

(Phil 3:12–14)

He does not rest on his laurels. Despite having travelled far and wide for the sake of the gospel, established churches and trained future workers, he was not complacent. He was determined to strive forward still to attain the crown of righteousness.

For those of us who have believed in and have served God for many

years, we have doubtless left many footprints behind us. Let us cover these and take every day as a new day. We are unworthy servants whom the Master has favored. We love because He first loved us. We serve because He gives us opportunities. If we have been a good and faithful servant and have done many things for our Lord Jesus Christ, let it be stored up in heaven.

“In these modern times, swearing, cursing or inappropriate dressing have become commonplace. If we voice our shock at or objection to this, we may be mocked as old school. Yet, these are the small areas in which we must strive to match up to God’s expected standard of holiness. We are the chosen people of God. We must be holy.

If we keep looking back and admiring our own beautiful footprints, we will not be aware of the dangers that may lie ahead of us. And if having served God faithfully for thirty years, we fall on the thirtieth year, all our past labor would have been in vain. The end of a matter is better than its beginning (Eccl 7:8). Thus, let us cover our feet and erase our footprints.

Covering our feet applies not only to the good things that we do, but also the bad things that we have done. It is easy to be spiritually-minded in spiritual convocations.

These Bible camps and training seminars provide good opportunities for us to repent before God. Without access to television, secular music or the Internet, our minds and hearts are clear and purely focused on God and God’s word. But when we return to our daily lives in the world, we face the onslaught of the world and its pernicious influences. We must then ensure that all the bad things we discarded during the spiritual convocation stay in the trash.

Every day that we are able to live, is one extra day to fight for our Lord Jesus Christ. But we must guard our steps very carefully. Our feet may leave many and deep tracks behind. If these are good deeds, let us not rest on our laurels and be proud. If these are bad deeds, quickly repent. Do not sin against God to the point that we cannot continue to walk.

A reason that we fall prey to pride is because of our tendency to compare ourselves to the things and people of the world. We feel we are doing well spiritually because the latter appear to be worse than we. Inadvertently, we fall into the Pharisaic trap of pride and self-righteousness (Lk 18:9–14). However, if we compared ourselves to servants such as Moses in the Old Testament and Paul in the New Testament who felt they were nothing compared to the almighty God, how much more undeserving we are!

God chose Moses to lead two million people. By Moses’ hand, God performed great miracles. Moses could easily have let that get to his head. But he did not. Instead, quite often, we see him falling flat on his face. Even when a group spoke against him, he fell flat on his face (Num 16:4). For most of those forty years Moses led the Israelites, Moses was flat on his face, in humility and in prayer to God. Little wonder God said that he was the most humble man on the face of the earth. Therefore, Moses was a successful soldier on the front line. He covered his face and covered his footprints. He thoroughly understood that he was nothing compared to God.



“If we want God to use us on the front line, we need to be prepared and equipped for service. Just as Isaiah was burned by the seraph, we too have to have our hearts burned and set on fire. We need to feel and be compelled by the love of God.”

FLY WITH WINGS

Besides humility and continual striving towards the finishing line, it is important for God's good soldiers to have wings that can fly. This means that our minds have to be kept in heaven. And spiritually, we always have to be above the things of this world.

Isaiah saw the seraphim using two wings to fly. In addition, he heard the seraphim proclaim: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isa 6:3). The prophet's response was immediate—“Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isa 6:5).

The Bible used the word “holy” three times. This reiterates its critical importance. Our God's primary attribute is His holiness, and He wants His people, His servants, and His soldiers to be holy (Lev 11:44, 19:2; 1 Pet 1:13–16). For us to battle at the front line and enjoy having God in our midst, our linen must be white and clean.

When Isaiah saw the seraphim cover the latter's face, he considered his own face and realized the uncleanness of his lips. Next, he saw the seraphim cover his two feet. The prophet looked at his own feet and realized that he had been dwelling in the midst of a people who were sinning against God. Although we appear to be doing better in terms of our holiness compared to our peers, if we truly examine our lives in detail, there are many areas in which we are unclean in the eyes of God.

In these modern times, swearing, cursing or inappropriate dressing have become commonplace. If we voice our shock at or objection to this, we

may be mocked as old school. Yet, these are the small areas in which we must strive to match up to God's expected standard of holiness. We are the chosen people of God. We must be holy. Even though we dwell in the midst of a people who practice perversion, we must be holy.

After Isaiah had seen the seraphim, he lifted up his eyes and saw the glory of the Lord. This is what we must do as well. In God's church, He is above all and over all. We are mere servants and have no right to lord it over other brethren. The irony is that if we puff ourselves up and consider that our service or our status has made us superior to others, we have not used our two wings to fly. We do not see God's glory.

BE PURIFIED BY FIRE

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.” (Isa 6:6–7)

The name “seraphim” means “burning ones” or “fiery ones.” If this were literally true, why did one of the seraphim have to grab the coal with a tong? This is because the fire from the coal was a consuming fire, i.e., the Spirit of God. In other words, when we know that we are unclean, we must pray to God, and ask God to fill us with His Spirit. On Isaiah's prompt, positive, and repentant response to the call for workers, God sent a seraph to burn and cleanse his lips. We may not yet be perfect and up to God's mark, but if we are willing, recognize our weaknesses and are prepared to

be purified, God can use us.

CONCLUSION

God has already told us that we belong to the army of heaven. Given their crucial role in safeguarding their nation, no soldier can afford to be idle—the army is engaged in an intense and crucial battle.

If we want God to use us on the front line, we need to be prepared and equipped for service. Just as Isaiah was burned by the seraph, we too have to have our hearts burned and set on fire. We need to feel and be compelled by the love of God. Hence in the same positive manner by which Isaiah responded to God's calling, we too have to respond eagerly and with repentance, “Here am I, send me.” It is important that we have the motivation stemming from our desire to repay the love of God, since it is God's love that gives us strength to live, a strength that we can bring with us and draw upon at the front line to help us survive.

The seraphim—the fiery ones—were burning with zeal, but there are six wings always attached to them. They know how important it is for them to have those six wings. Besides being zealous with hearts burning to serve God, we must cover our faces, ensure we do not leave big footprints behind us, fly above the world, and be constantly purified. So when God says, “Who will go for Us? Whom shall I send?” We can say, “Here am I! Send me.” ★



Preaching the Mystery of Faith (I)

Adapted from a lecture series by Derren Liang—Irvine, California, USA

Editor's note: This series provides insights on how we can share the doctrines of the True Jesus Church. The author offers tips on how to approach familiar topics, and to avoid certain pitfalls. It is hoped that our readers will be inspired to apply their knowledge to reach out to friends and relatives.

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Spirit has revealed five basic doctrines to our church that are different from what other churches believe. A good way to share the beliefs of the True Jesus Church (TJC) is to further elaborate on these doctrines. Once our audience understands and believes, the next step can be to introduce the concept of the one true church. This is because, before someone understands the truth, it can be difficult for them to accept the teaching of the one true church. Once they have grasped the biblical truths, however, it is much easier for them to reach a natural conclusion about the necessity and identity of the one true church.

The Importance of the Basic Doctrines

Out of the many churches today, TJC is one of the few that remains insistent on placing emphasis on the significance of the basic doctrines of the Bible. For this reason, many denominations regard us as legalistic,

preferring instead to emphasize the teaching of love over the other tenets of Christianity.

Why do we need to learn and uphold these basic doctrines? We need to place emphasis on biblical doctrines because Ephesians 1 says the church is the body of Christ which is filled with the fullness of God: “which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:23). Who is God? Undoubtedly, God is love, and it is not wrong for the church to teach and practice love because without it, God will not abide with us. However, as crucial as love is in Christianity, truth must equally be upheld.

When Jesus gave His final commission to the disciples, He told them to preach the gospel, telling them to “[Teach] them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). In light of this commandment, how can we ensure that God abides with the church? It is by teaching the believers to observe the teachings of Jesus and

the apostles in the Bible.

Since God is truth, Spirit and love, His true church—the body of Christ—must likewise embrace all aspects of the gospel. When the teachings of the church are the same as the teachings of Jesus, God will be with us. God's spirit, the Holy Spirit, and the truth are interconnected. When we preach the truth according to the Bible, the Holy Spirit will move together with us, helping us in our ministry and personal lives.

This is the reason why the TJC believes it is imperative to seriously study and practice biblical doctrines. The true church must practice a holistic Christianity that does not prefer one aspect of the teaching to another.

Benefits of Knowing the Doctrines

There are two important benefits of knowing the biblical doctrines: one is so that we can be rooted in faith, and the other is to enable us to be equipped for evangelism.



TO DEVELOP A ROOTED FAITH

We need to have a deeply rooted faith, fully knowing whom we believe. Only then can we stand firm and not waver when our faith is challenged. For instance, one perplexing challenge to our legitimacy is the question: if TJC is the only true church that will be saved, why is her membership so small? Here, it is important for us to know that attempting to ascertain whether a church has the truth on the basis of membership size is flawed. Especially since Jesus had already characterized the way to salvation as a narrow gate.

Today, there are “mega” churches that have thousands of members. But their approach to salvation is deliberately simplistic: they argue that all you need to do is to believe in your heart and confess with your lips to be saved. Furthermore, they offer little guidance with regards to Christian living. You rarely hear them teaching about the need to take up one’s cross in order to follow Christ. Rather, their message is often about how Christ is a never-ending source of material blessings. This is perhaps the quickest way to attract large masses of people.

Many churches are also hesitant to articulate a firm standpoint with regards to sin and doctrine. For example, they do not teach their believers to pray for the Holy Spirit, to be baptized, or to observe the Sabbath. If they teach such things, they will most likely lose members; likewise, if they take a stand against common, socially-accepted sins. For this reason, they will not talk about abortion, homosexuality, or divorce.

Hence, when assessing the legitimacy of a church, we should not use membership volume as a measure. Whilst we certainly want more people to receive salvation, we cannot forfeit the “harder” truths of Christianity and speak only of the more pleasant parts of Christ’s gospel.

We need to be familiar with the basic doctrines so that we can be steadfast in our faith. The greater the depth of our understanding, the more we will cherish the truth of God’s true church.

We have seen that there are members who feel the need to modify

the truth, most likely because they find it hard to preach the complete gospel in the face of opposition, and think that by changing the Bible’s message, it will be more palatable. However, if we preach a modified doctrine, will God abide with the church?

TO BE EQUIPPED FOR EVANGELISM

It is important to know the basic doctrines because they are essential for evangelism. When some believers preach, they spend a lot of time sharing their testimonies. There is nothing wrong with this *per se*; indeed, testimonies are powerful instruments to highlight the grace of God. However, we should not rely on using testimonies alone.

If we look at the approach of the disciples, we see that they preached the doctrine they had received from Christ while God affirmed their message with signs and miracles. We need to do likewise so that people can develop firm roots in their faith. If they come to understand the truth, they will quite naturally experience God for themselves. On the other hand, if they only know about the experiences of others without understanding the truth, the substance of their faith, they could quite easily fall away.

Therefore, we must pair our powerful testimonies of Christ’s grace in our lives with the doctrines that He has handed down to us through the Holy Spirit. The truth is the path to salvation and this is why the basic doctrines are important.

Preaching the Doctrines

Technique: Establish Common Ground

When we share the gospel with others, we will do well to first find common ground. When speaking with Christians from other denominations, we can start with three of the most common Christian beliefs: the one true God, Jesus, and the Bible. From these topics, we can proceed to discuss on other aspects of the truth, using the Bible as our reference to analyze differences. This approach will have the added benefit of dispelling any myths they might have gathered on their own, say from an Internet search, on the True Jesus Church.

Respect is important. Paul’s opening words when preaching to the people of Athens was: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious....” Then, in his bid to introduce the true God, he added, “For as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription; TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:22–23). We need to learn to be tactful and non-aggressive when we preach, always seeking to find common ground.

“The Holy Spirit has revealed five basic doctrines to our church that are different from what other churches believe. A good way to share the beliefs of the True Jesus Church is to elaborate on these doctrines.



Case Study on Romans 10:10

For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Many Christians, quoting Romans 10:10, claim that as long as we believe in our heart and confess with our mouth, we can be saved. The scene of Christian evangelists who rouse their audiences at evangelistic rallies to raise their hands if they believe in Jesus is a common sight. These mass conversions and affirmations of faith are certainly inspiring and moving to many who witness them. However, is their approach adequate? What is missing from the messages given out at such evangelistic events?

journey. From Jesus' words in John 3:5, we can show that one also needs to be born of water and the Spirit in order to enter the kingdom of God.

Many such clear and direct instructions given by Jesus are rarely mentioned by many churches. It would be a gross error to miss out on the commands of Jesus just because we prefer to only live according to some portions of the Bible.

To continue with this particular doctrine, our approach could be to ask our Christian friends to look at John 3:5 and to share what their understanding is. We should be prepared for various responses; for example, some Christians interpret being "born of water" to mean the physical birthing process (i.e.,

We can then explain that this Bible verse states that God saved us not because of our own righteousness; indeed, man is sinful by nature, and there is not one person who is righteous and able to attain to the standard of God. However, we can receive salvation because of God's mercy. He has paved the way through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. These are the two steps that Jesus speaks of in John 3:5.

Of the five basic doctrines, the two key teachings relate to the "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." The reason why TJC emphasizes these is because they are essential for salvation. For this reason, we must never compromise on these aspects of the truth but instead uphold them steadfastly. ★

To be continued.

It is important to know the basic doctrines because they are essential for evangelism. ... We must pair our powerful testimonies of Christ's grace in our lives with the doctrines that He has handed down to us through the Holy Spirit. The truth is the path to salvation and this is why the basic doctrines are important.

They simply lack any regard for the concrete directives of Jesus to do certain things in order to participate in the salvation of Christ. To take one such doctrine as an example, Jesus says, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5).

We do not deny Paul's words in Romans 10:10. Indeed, it is an area of common ground we have with our Christian friends. However, we need to use the rest of the Bible to explain that believing in one's heart and acknowledging Jesus with our lips is but the beginning of a person's faith

emergence from the mother's womb and the surrounding amniotic fluid). At this point, we can point out the need to explain this verse using other parts of the Bible; otherwise everyone will interpret the Bible according to their personal understanding.

We can then signpost them to Titus 3:5, which explains the meaning of John 3:5:

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. (Tit 3:5)



PAGAN ORIGIN

Some four thousand years ago, the ancient Celts settled in lands known today as Ireland, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France. To them, October 31 was the end of summer. As temperatures dropped and leaves began falling in autumn, nature almost seemed to be dying. To explain the change in climate, legend has it that Celtic priests, known as Druids, taught how Muck Olla, their sun god, was losing strength and Samhain, the lord of death, was overpowering him. As a result, the Celts began celebrating a festival on November 1 in dedication to Samhain, naming it after him as well.

On Samhain Eve, the Celts celebrated the festival by burning animals (and even humans) as sacrifices to Samhain to appease him. The Druids weaved an elaborate story: the souls of the dead were magically transferred to and confined in animal bodies. Therefore, every Samhain Eve, the myth went, Samhain released the souls of all who had died during the previous year to their former homes to visit the living.

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, Samhain was an important

precursor to Halloween. The souls of the dead were supposed to revisit their homes on the day of Samhain, and the autumnal festival acquired sinister significance, with demons of all kinds said to be roaming about. It was the time to appease supernatural powers and thought to be the most favorable time for divinations concerning luck, health, and death.

FEATURES: TRICK OR TREAT

On Samhain Eve, the Druids, as well as the common folks, would go from house to house asking for fatted calves, black sheep, and human beings for sacrifices. Those who gave were promised prosperity while those who refused were cursed and threatened. Furthermore, it was believed that since the returning spirits would be hungry, one should set out treats for them in order to avoid being cursed and tormented. This was a custom known as "mumming" and in other parts of the Western world, "souling." This is believed to have gradually evolved to the modern custom of children requesting for treats or threatening tricks, commonly known as the practice of "Trick-or-Treat."

FEATURES: MASKS, COSTUMES AND PARTIES

On the eve of Samhain, the Celts masqueraded in costumes made of animal skins and heads to disguise themselves from the returning souls. Tradition has it that they would chant and dance around flames and parade through streets making loud noises in the hope of warding off or confusing the returning souls. It is believed that these practices have been perpetuated in the form of today's Halloween where revelers dance in elaborate ghoulish masks and costumes at wild parties, or parade in street carnivals.

WHO ESTABLISHED HALLOWEEN?

It is commonly believed, based on several records, that by the fourth century, the churches in the east were holding a feast dedicated to all martyrs on May 13. Hence, in 609 A.D., when Pope Boniface IV wanted to dedicate the Pantheon in Rome as a cathedral in honor of Mary and all martyrs, he picked May 13 for the occasion. From then on, it was known as All Saints' Day.

However, in the eighth century, Pope Gregory III moved this holiday to November 1 to coincide with

Samhain. The move was effected by dedicating a chapel in St. Peter's, Rome, in honor of all saints on that day.

Subsequent ecclesiastical documents, such as the 800 A.D. Alcuin records and a ninth century English calendar, show that All Saints' Day was kept on November 1.

Finally, in 837 A.D., Pope Gregory IV ordered its general observance. In medieval England, the festival was known as All Hallows' Day (referring to the saints being hallowed beings). Accordingly, the eve of the festival was known as All Hallows' Eve, which became abbreviated to just Hallows' Eve and eventually just "Halloween."

WHY WE SHOULD NOT CELEBRATE HALLOWEEN

First and foremost, Halloween and its festivities are distinctly pagan in origin. Furthermore, underlying Halloween is the deceitful theory that spirits of dead men return to the world of the living. Ecclesiastes 12:7 says: "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it." Christians unknowingly promote heresies by celebrating Halloween.

Underlying Halloween is the deceitful theory that spirits of dead men return to the world of the living.

Second, Halloween is openly associated with demonic activities such as witchcraft, fortune-telling, and necromancy. Deuteronomy 18:9–13 warns: "When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things [are] an abomination

By celebrating Halloween, we embrace the ideals of this festival's pagan origins and demonic associations, an image unfit for a faithful Christian.

to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God."

By celebrating Halloween, we embrace the ideals of this festival's pagan origins and demonic associations, an image unfit for a faithful Christian.

At one time, Manasseh "practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, and consulted mediums and spiritists." The Bible described what he had done as "evil in the sight of the Lord" and noted that these acts of his "provoked the Lord to anger" (2 Chr 33:6).

Acts 19:18–19 records that those who became Christians renounced all dealings with the occults and burned all occult materials they had. Paul condemned witchcraft: "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are ... sorcery." 1 Peter 4:3–5 adds: "For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles--when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."

Third, a danger of Halloween is the popularization of the devil and the normalization of the practices of darkness. The propaganda of its festivities allows children to easily accept the occults and then be entrapped. The devil remakes himself as a pop-cultural icon and a celebrated personality. Christians are warned: "I do not want you to have fellowship with demons," "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you," "Nor give place

to the devil." Ephesians 5:6–12 says: "Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ... And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret."

Fourth, we should guard ourselves against Christians of other denominations who propose that since the import of Halloween to the Western world was due in large part to the Catholic church, the festival is in fact positively "Christian" in nature. Deuteronomy 12:28 lays the fundamental lesson here: "Take heed to yourself that you are not snared by following them, after they are destroyed from before you; and that you inquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? Even so will I do likewise. You shall not do so unto the LORD your God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hates, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burned in the fire to their gods. Whatsoever thing I command you, observe to do it: you shall not add thereto, nor take away from it."

God's edicts for us are simple and straightforward. He has no desire to see us adopt the religious customs of our neighbors, especially if they are satanic in nature, and transplant them to our worship of Him. Let us be clear about our faith and our standards of true worship. ★

ENGLISH WRITERS' RETREAT 2016

Register from now until June 15th, 2016 at <http://events.tjc.org>

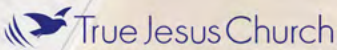
SUN 10 JULY - SAT 16 JULY
HOUSTON CHURCH

Ever thought of writing for church?

If you have always wanted to write for church, but never had the time to do so, the English Writers' Retreat is for you.

The purpose of this retreat is to give writers the opportunity to take part in literary ministry. During this one-week retreat, participants will be able to withdraw from the cares of their busy lives and focus on writing for the church. Through collaboration and discussions, they will also draw inspiration and encouragement from fellow writers.

If you have any questions regarding this retreat, please see the contact information on the registration site.



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 word 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.

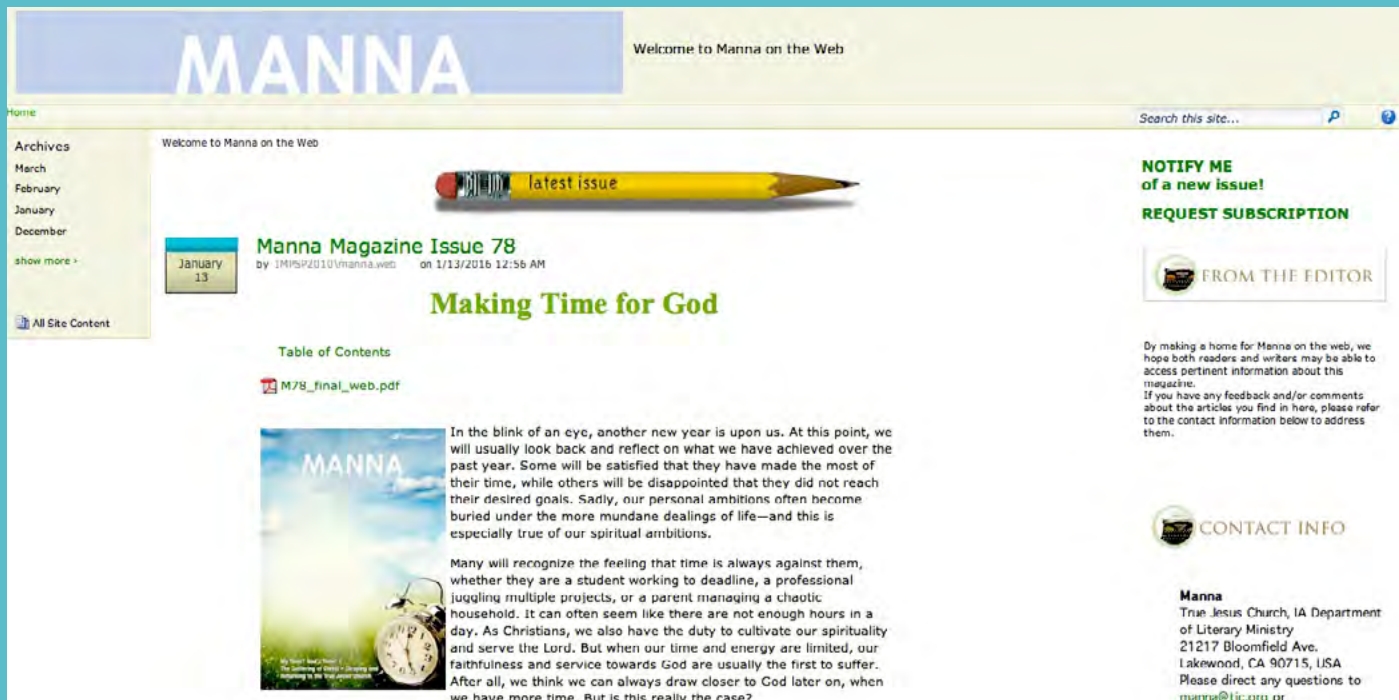
A devotional is a pithy article (300 to 350 words) inspired by biblical teachings.

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 screenshot shows the Manna Magazine website interface. At the top, a purple banner displays the word "MANNA" in large white letters. To the right, a yellow banner says "Welcome to Manna on the Web". Below the banner, a navigation bar includes "Home", "Archives" (with links for March, February, January, December, and a "show more" link), and "All Site Content". A search bar is located on the right. The main content area features a yellow pencil graphic labeled "latest issue" above the title "Manna Magazine Issue 78" by IMHSP2010@manna.web, dated 1/13/2016 12:56 AM. The featured article is "Making Time for God" with a table of contents link and a PDF download link "M78_final_web.pdf". The article text discusses the challenge of finding time for God amidst busy schedules. On the right sidebar, there are links for "NOTIFY ME of a new issue!", "REQUEST SUBSCRIPTION", "FROM THE EDITOR", and "CONTACT INFO". The contact information for Manna at True Jesus Church is provided at the bottom right.

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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: 2500-3000 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: 2500-3000 words.

Exhortation

An Exhortation encourages and admonishes the reader in different aspects of the Christian faith.
Article length: 2000-2500 words.

Testimony

A Testimony recounts an experience in the Lord that will encourage and edify the reader.
Article length: 1500-2000 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: +1-562-402-3190

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

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Author Guidelines and Editorial Calendar

Issue #81:

Topic: Autumn

Articles due: July 1, 2016

*"For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there,
But water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower
And bread to the eater." (Isa 55:10)*

Autumn is the beginning of Israel's rainy season and the time of sowing, hence autumn rain is also known as "early rain". These autumn showers soften the parched ground, preparing it to receive new seeds. Autumn thus points to the beginning of growth.

God's plan of salvation is conceived in eternity (Eph 1:4), then unfolded and executed in history (Heb 1:1-4; 2:8; Eph 1:10). Although God fulfilled His salvation plan in the New Testament era, He had planted the seeds of the gospel in the Old Testament (1 Pet 1:10-12; Heb 4:2).

Let's explore the Old Testament's roots of our faith to better appreciate the beauty of God's great salvation plan and deepen our faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the Anointed King, foreordained to reign for all eternity.

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.

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 sacrament of footwashing enables one to have a part with the Lord Jesus. It also serves as a constant reminder that one should have love, holiness, humility, forgiveness, and service. Every person who has received water baptism must have his/her feet washed in the name of Jesus Christ. Mutual footwashing may be practiced whenever is appropriate.

Holy Communion

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

Sabbath Day

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

Salvation

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

Last Day

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

TRUE JESUS CHURCH CONTACT INFORMATION

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

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