

# MANNA

ISSUE 82  
Winter



**The Winter Rains • When Suffering Comes •  
The Seventh Blessing in the End Time • A Letter to Our  
Youths: Thoughts on Career and Marriage**

“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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Winter

# Paradoxical Winter

by Peter Shee—Singapore

*Winter in Israel differs from the drab, depressing and frosty months in some places. After autumn seeding at the beginning of the rainy season, the showers increase into heavy winter rains, causing the crops to grow. The rain should continue into spring, when the latter rain matures the grain for harvest. However, weather in the holy land is as unpredictable as the hearts of the children of Israel, so when rainfall becomes sporadic or when there is no latter rain, many of the crops fail to ripen, resulting in a poor harvest. In biblical times, this was a reflection of God's displeasure with His people (Jer 3:3).*

*So on one hand, winter is the gateway to fruitfulness and vitality; on the other hand, it can be a time of trepidation. Hence, winter is a time of waiting—either in joyful expectation of renewal or with repentant prayer for restoration. In either case, it is a time of looking to God to fulfill His promises when spring arrives.*

*Theme article “The Winter Rains” reminds us of God's faithfulness—He executes His eternal plan throughout human history out of His goodwill, despite human weakness, fickleness and faithlessness.*

*The Bible Study, “The Dwelling Place Where God has Chosen to Establish His Name (II),” continues to look at the church as the culmination of God's dwelling with men. Time and again, God departs and returns to His disobedient people, to the land of His choice, to dwell in the tabernacle erected for His name. From the rejection of Eli and Shiloh to the choosing of David and Jerusalem, the Lord maps out His unchanging plan to establish for Himself a community in the Messiah, in whose midst He will permanently dwell. From the winter of rejection to the spring of restoration in the apostolic times—in*

*today's context, we witness the revival of the true church that conforms to the apostolic faith.*

*It is interesting to compare God's departure and return with the story of departure and return of God's people from the land of Israel in “Naomi's Return.” The Bethlehem family's encounter with famine, death, and eventual restoration ought to teach us to wait on God instead of losing hope in adversity. Christian understanding of suffering and our appropriate response to it are explored in “When Suffering Comes.” The article “Moses Returns to Egypt (I)” highlights the fact that we do not know our time and, much less, God's time. It again brings to the fore the fact that we should wait on the Lord, for He makes all things beautiful in His time (Eccl 3:11).*

*“Against the Tide” takes lessons from Noah, who stood against the surging waves of moral decline, and walked with God while waiting for the cleansing deluge. Moreover, this article cites examples of moral issues in the modern world and offers practical approaches to standing against them.*

*One interesting point in “Hard Hearts” is the call to thaw our hearts. If there is a commonality between the summer and winter, it must be the hardness of the parched ground and the frozen hearts that require thawing.*

*May this issue of Manna evoke in you an earnest expectation of renewal, and the prayer: “Lord to my heart bring back the springtime. Take away the cold and dark of sin!”<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Kurt Kaiser, “Bring Back the Springtime.” Copyright: 1970 by Word Music (a division of Word, inc.).

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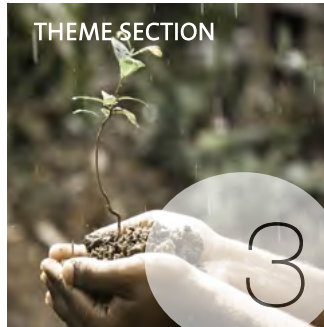
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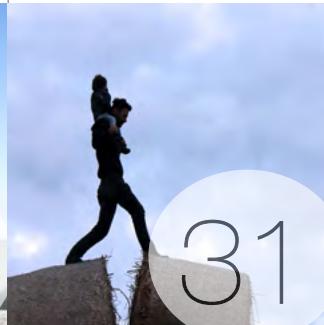
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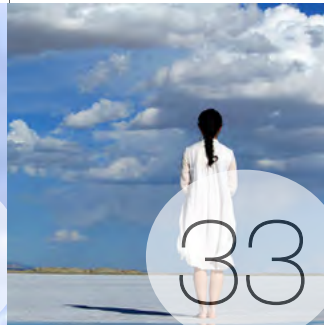
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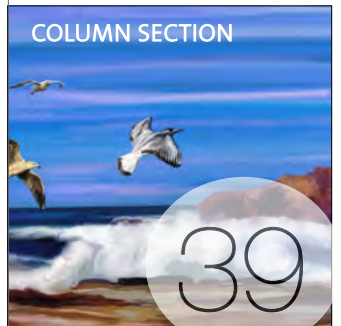
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# Winter





# The Winter Rains

Vincent Yeung—Cambridge, UK

Most people dislike winter, the coldest period of the year, characterized by dark and gloomy days. In winter, the seas give up their blue and the stones no longer show their russet colors. Naked trees line the avenue. The winter wind howls through the desolate marsh and, on the horizon, the sky melts into the earth in a blend of indistinguishable grey tones. If winter is such a bleak, lifeless and desolate season, would we not be better off without it? Yet the Bible tells us that there is a season for everything and a time for every purpose (Eccl 3:1).

Winter in the holy land is the period of heaviest rain; hence, the rain associated with winter (Ezra 10:9) is known as *geshem*, a word referring to a violent downpour. Autumn showers soften the parched ground for sowing; come winter, the heavier rainfall allows the crops to grow. When winter is past, the rain is gone. Flowers appear on the earth, fig trees put forth their green figs, and vines hang heavy with tender grapes (Song 2:11–13). In *Nisan* (March), the latter rains nourish the barley and wheat crops before they are ready for harvest. God gives us seasons and appointed weeks for the harvest. Integral to the entire agricultural cycle are the former and latter rains (Jer 5:24; Deut 11:14).

## FORMER RAIN

The eternal purpose of God has been hidden since the foundation of this world (Eph 3:11; cf. 1:4); but this purpose would be disclosed at the appointed time (Eph 3:9). God promised that after the Messiah is

pierced, a steady stream of living water will continue throughout the earth in summer and winter (Zech 14:8). This refers to the former and latter rains which bring life. The former rain represents the downpour of the Holy Spirit in the apostolic period. Jesus commanded the apostles to remain in Jerusalem to receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 1:4, 8). Sure enough, the Holy Spirit alighted upon the apostles on the day of the Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4). Peter then testified boldly for Jesus, and 3,000 received the word and were baptized (Act 2:41). The church was established by the power of the Holy Spirit. The gospel did indeed come “[not] in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 1:5).

Undoubtedly, when the gospel flourishes, Satan will oppose the church. The Bible depicts Satan as a dragon standing before a pregnant woman (signifying the church), ready to devour her Child (Rev 12:4). In fact, even when the apostles were still alive, the gospel was already being adulterated (Gal 1:6; 1 Cor 15:12; Col 2:8, 18; 2 Pet 2:1; Jude 1:4). Just as Jesus had prophesied through the parable of the kingdom, the church—like a mustard seed that became a colossal tree—would be secularized and institutionalized. The birds of the air would lodge in its branches (Mt 13:32), and snatch the seeds (i.e., God’s word) from people’s hearts (Mt 13:4, 19). The secularized church would be like the leavened dough (Mt 13:31–33; cf. 1 Cor 6:6–8); full of sin, void of the truth and the Holy Spirit.

God had, on many occasions,

withheld rain from Israel because of the wickedness and idolatry of the people (Jer 3:2–3; Lk 4:25). Similarly, the cessation and withdrawal of the Holy Spirit caused famine and desolation in the secularized church. In 1517, Martin Luther famously nailed his *95 Theses of Contention* to the church door at Wittenberg, listing out 95 issues of heretical theology; the crimes of the Roman Catholic Church epitomised the corruption of a secularized church.

### GOD'S UNCEASING WORK

During these dark hours, revelation ceased and God seemed far away. God-fearing people sought God but they could neither hear His word nor find Him (Amos 8:11–12).

Even though God's revelation had ceased, and the Holy Spirit no longer lived amongst humankind, God continued to work and lay the groundwork for the salvation of His chosen people at the appointed time. Jesus told us that "the Father has been working until now" (Jn 5:17b). We may not realize it, but God never stops working; He continues to work behind the scenes, gradually unfolding and realizing His plan.

Throughout the ages, God has inspired devout people to prepare the ground for His chosen ones. In the Old Testamental era, Elijah thought he was the only prophet left when he was relentlessly persecuted by Jezebel the evil queen (1 Kg 18:4; 19:14). Unknown to him, God had preserved 7,000 faithful worshippers (1 Kg 19:18).

In more modern times, God has inspired musicians to leave a legacy of beautiful hymns for present-day Christians. Joseph Scriven (born in 1820) was the lyricist of one of Christendom's most well-known hymns, *What a friend we have in Jesus*. His lyrics might have been influenced by the tragic death of his bride-to-be on the eve of their wedding, but his expressions on the burden of sin, the sorrow, and poignant sighs of distress, resonate in every human heart throughout the ages.



God has also inspired translators. Many devoted Christians toiled and even died for their conviction that the Bible should be made available to ordinary people. The first English manuscripts were translated from the Latin Vulgate in 1380 by John Wycliffe, an Oxford professor and theologian. His follower, John Hus, was burned at the stake in 1415 for actively promoting Wycliffe's idea that the layman should be permitted

of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms in Jewish history was the result of their wickedness—idolatry in the former (2 Kg 17:13–16) and Manasseh's sins in the latter (2Kg 24:3). Suffering and destruction also result from human cruelty—when Assyria, the rod of God's anger, overstepped, they went from being the instrument to become the target of destruction (Isa 10:5, 7; cf. Hab 1:17).

”*Though the post-apostolic church ended in failure because of human weakness, God had already planned to redeem His chosen ones in the last days.*

to read the Bible in his own language. Martin Luther was the first person to translate and publish the Bible in the commonly spoken Germanic dialect. Luther initiated church reform, urging a return to the Bible as the source of the truth. Despite limited success in getting the Catholic Church to return to the original doctrines, his actions led to the emergence of many Christian denominations. The Chinese Union Version of the Bible, for example, was translated by a panel with members from the various Protestant denominations.

Jesus told His disciples He was sending them to reap that harvest for which others had labored (Jn 4:38); they were to labor until the season that His plan was to be fulfilled (Act 1:7).

### GOD'S ETERNAL LOVE

Humankind suffered because of human weakness and God's righteous judgment. The transgression of Adam brought sin and death into the world and triggered the condemnation of all men (Rom 5:12, 18). The destruction

War and famine do not discriminate between the wicked aggressors or innocent bystanders; all have to go through the ordeal; some will survive, some will perish.

Despite man's weakness, God's eternal purpose and love towards His chosen ones remain unchanged. Before God sent Adam and Eve away, He clothed them with garments of skin to protect them and keep them warm (Gen 3:21). Suffering and judgment were often intertwined with His tender loving care and consolation, demonstrating His eternal purpose and salvation plan. Hearing the people's outcry during the Syro-Ephraimite war, God promised deliverance and the coming of Immanuel (Isa 7:14). Sennacherib's onslaught brought affliction and anxiety, but God's guidance was never far away (Isa 30:20–21). No matter what happened to the physical Jerusalem, a remnant was preserved to take root and to prosper (Isa 37:31–32). The remnant survived due to God's goodness and eternal purpose (Isa 1:9), without which destruction was inevitable. The



“remnant will return,” and a highway will open up for them, even though they had been scattered (Isa 10:20–21; 11:16, 11).

God’s intention is unequivocally declared to the remnant: *I will save you and I will bring you back* (Jer 30:10, 18). He took the initiative to save His remnant. God’s eternal purpose cannot be frustrated or scuppered by man’s failure. Man fails and becomes faithless, but God remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:11–13). He deals with humankind out of His “everlasting love” (Jer 31:3) and the faithfulness He promised to Abraham (Ps 105:42; Lk 1:72–73). Historically, He redeemed and ransomed, built and rebuilt the exiled people (Jer 31:7, 11, 4). But His ultimate rebuilding work is the making of a new covenant, putting His law into individual hearts and minds (Jer 31: 31, 33); this is fulfilled by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our heart (2 Cor 3:6). Though the post-apostolic church ended in failure because of human weakness, God had already planned to redeem His chosen ones in the last days.

It is interesting to note that Joel’s prophecy, recorded in Joel 2:28–32, was only partially fulfilled by the apostolic church (Act 2:17–21). The last three verses of the prophecy concern cosmological events which would only take place in the last days, before Jesus’ second coming. Those who call on the name of the Lord in those last days shall also be saved.

The end-time portion of God’s salvation plan unfolded when He established the True Jesus Church in Beijing, China, in 1917. This was the time which God had appointed to re-establish His church by the Holy Spirit—when He set His hand “the second time” (Isa 11:11). Through

the Holy Spirit, the spiritual wilderness and wasteland became a fruitful field, a forest and a garden (Isa 32:15; 51:3).

### HOPE AND PERSEVERE

There is always a tension between present and future. We experience hope in the immediate present, but the fulfilment of that hope is only realized in the distant future. As Paul succinctly put it: “[W]e were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope” (Rom 8:24a). Therefore, both the natural world and the believers still groan and wait for redemption (Rom 8:22–23). God has promised deliverance, but our strength to hold on is derived from hope and perseverance, allowing us to quietly and submissively wait for God’s salvation (Isa 30:15, 18).

“While waiting, quietly and confidently, for the second coming, we should actively cultivate ourselves spiritually.”

It can be difficult to remain hopeful when we go through trials. When the people of God went through periods of turmoil, they were confused, saddened by their sins and plight (Lam 5:22; Ps 137:1), and they lamented on the injustice they had to endure (Hab 1:1, 13). Paul described his own suffering as “above strength,” causing him to “[despair] even of life” (2 Cor 1:8), when he reminded the believers that they had to go through many tribulations (Acts 14:22). In the midst of their trials, the author of Hebrews warned the believers not to

drift away, neglect their salvation, or cast away their confidence (Heb 2:1–2; 10:35).

God is the God of comfort and the spring of everlasting consolation (2 Cor 1:3; 2 Thess 2:16). We are born of God, and by faith we can overcome the world (1 Jn 5:4). Only when our faith is tested by trials will it be found genuine and become more precious than gold (1 Pet 1:6–8). God is faithful, He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear (1 Cor 10:13). Paul’s affirmation of his trust in God was not based on the will of man. He had come to the brink of death many times, but survived each ordeal. His past experiences buttressed his present faith, such that he firmly believed God would be able to deliver him from any future troubles, extending to the final act of deliverance into the heavenly kingdom. This assurance is unrestricted by place and time, and encompasses all who trust in God—knowing this enabled Paul to comfort those who were in trouble (2 Cor 1:4, 10). God is a faithful God; His word is righteous and He will not renege on His promises (Isa 45:22–23; cf. Ps 132:11). The Bible describes His will as what He has purposed (Isa 14:24), and His eternal purpose is to fulfil the promise to Abraham and have mercy on Jacob (Isa 14:1; Heb 6:13; cf. Deut 29:13).

### BREAK UP YOUR FALLOW GROUND

While waiting, quietly and confidently, for the second coming, we should actively cultivate ourselves spiritually. The Bible uses many active phrases to encourage us to engage positively with our faith. Paul reminded believers to “work out their salvation” (Phil 2:12); Peter used the term “be even more diligent” (2 Pet 1:10); and the Lord Jesus commanded us “to shine” (Mt 5:16). Therefore, we should not just sit on our hands, behaving as a disinterested and apathetic bystander, turning up late for service, melting into the crowd, and not taking any interest in interacting with fellow church members.



”*Winter, a seemingly unfruitful season, is in fact a period of preparation and waiting. It points to God’s faithfulness. Just as He continuously provides rain for the crops to grow, God also keeps showering His grace upon us and continuously nourishes us.*

Worse, if we are passive in our faith, then we may become complacent and expect to gain our salvation without any commitment. We might tick the boxes: baptism, foot washing, receiving the Holy Spirit, partaking in Holy Communion regularly, and attending Sabbath services. But what about street leafleting? *What if my work colleagues see me?* Or inviting friends to evangelistic services so they can hear the gospel? *They might not want to be my friends if they find out I’m a Christian.* Or leading hymns before Sabbath service? *Give others a chance to work for the church.* What is wrong with such objections? While we think these are valid reasons for our behavior, these actions (or lack of them) actually show that we are ashamed of Christ, ashamed of being a Christian. We have forgotten why we came to believe. Unknowingly, we have become the fallow and barren ground.

Paul tells us to redeem the time as the days are short and evil (Eph 5:16; Rom 13:11). The dangers before us today are temptations, heresies and idleness. When we give less time to God, He is no longer our priority. In stark contrast, God is gracious. He continues to preserve us, showering us with blessings (Hos 6:3). His Spirit pours into our hearts, just like rain softening the ground to prepare it to be ploughed and sown with seed. Fallow ground, ploughed but not seeded, will yield no fruit. He who sows righteousness will reap mercy, he who sows wickedness will reap iniquity (Hos 10:12). Salvation is purely a result of God’s mercy, but we still need to sow righteousness in words and behavior; then at the right time, a torrent of righteousness will fall upon us.

## CONCLUSION

Winter, a seemingly unfruitful season, is in fact a period of preparation and waiting. It points to God’s faithfulness. Just as He continuously provides rain for the crops to grow, God also keeps showering His grace upon us and continuously nourishes us. We need to make the most of this period to grow and equip ourselves spiritually (Jas 1:3–4). To realize God’s kingdom on earth, we must first establish His rule in the true church. Instead of yearning and asking, “How long, how long?” we should serve God in joy and with quiet confidence. The kingdom of God will spring up without us knowing (Mk 4:26–27); God will enable His faithful to witness His salvation as long as they wait faithfully (Lk 2:25).

How have you been nourished by God? How do you see God’s faithfulness in your life? Winter is a time of waiting. The farmer has to wait for the crops to ripe, as the winter rain continues into spring. Do you have the patience to wait for God, and to rejoice in and derive your strength from Him (Hab 2:3; 3:17–19)? ★





# When Suffering Comes

Adapted from a sermon by Hsing Yi Yao—Xin Zhuang, Taiwan

## INTRODUCTION

Suffering can confront us in many different situations—when we are faced with misfortunes, or pressure, or an impasse in our life that seems impossible to break through. At times such as these, depression is never far away, and we can barely muster the strength to smile. We will ask ourselves, “Why me? Why do I have to face such sufferings?” And then we will question God, “Why have You let this happen to me?”

Unfortunately, some of us never find answers to these questions—they become complaints that lead us nowhere. We fail to face the problem head on, to humbly examine ourselves and allow God to reveal the truth to us. Perhaps our suffering truly has a purpose.

Winter in the holy land is a season of severe cold and heavy, sometimes violent, rainfall and snow. This is why

Jesus told His disciples that when the great tribulation comes, they should “pray that [their] flight may not be in winter” (Mk 13:18). But the winter quickly gives way to spring, and the crops and vegetation begin to bud and grow (Isa 55:10). It may seem as though the winter months are a test of endurance, but the combination of rain, snow and time are necessary to bring forth the fruit of the land.

Similarly, the trials and tribulations we go through are like the bitterness of winter, which seems bleak, depressing, and fruitless. But, as Christians, we must patiently endure the harsh winter in order to see the fruition of God’s work in us (Acts 14:22; Jas 1:2–4). And if we carefully examine the cause of our suffering, we will understand why we must suffer—why the rains must fall—in order for us to spiritually grow.

## WHERE DOES SUFFERING COME FROM?

The Bible tells us that suffering first entered the world when man sinned (Gen 3:17–19). God cursed the ground, bringing forth thorns and thistles, so that man would have to labor and toil to survive.

When man sinned, he fell short of the glory of God and lost the image of God. He lost his father-son relationship with God, and became spiritually dead. And not only would his life be full of toil, but it would eventually end in physical death. This is the fundamental source of human anxiety, and the paradox of the human condition: that the spectre of death is present every moment of our lives. We are haunted by the question, *Where will I go when I depart from this world?*

Every affliction we face in life, be it physical sickness or work-related stress, is directly or indirectly the result of sin. More often than not, it is a result of our own lusts and desires. When Job experienced suffering, Eliphaz the Temanite told him, “For affliction does not come from the dust, nor does trouble spring from the ground; yet man is born to trouble, as

“The trials and tribulations we go through are like the bitterness of winter, which seems bleak, depressing, and fruitless. But, as Christians, we must patiently endure the harsh winter in order to see the fruition of God’s work in us.”

the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:6–7). Eliphaz was telling Job that trouble does not come from nowhere. He believed that Job must have sinned against God.

### We Do Not Always Have to Sin to Suffer

We later read that, much to God’s displeasure, Eliphaz had misjudged Job’s situation (Job 42:7). He correctly stated that man suffers because of sin, but it does not necessarily follow that Job’s afflictions were a result of his own sin. The Bible introduces Job as an upright and blameless man—there was no other like him in that generation (Job 1:1, 8). It would be difficult to argue that his suffering was a punishment for sin. And yet, he was struck with disaster and disease. We are compelled to ask, “Why?”

In our life of faith, we may find ourselves in a similar situation as Job. After we are baptized, we may put our heart into pursuing God’s word, and grasp every opportunity to serve God. In our daily lives, we may fear God, manifest His image, and glorify Jesus’ name in all that we do. But still, we are not immune from experiencing trials and tribulations—we will face sickness, bereavement, financial insecurity, family problems, and any other affliction common to man. We can even suffer for doing good (1 Pet 2:20). But we might find ourselves asking, “What have I done to deserve this? Am I not a good Christian?” Will we begin to lose hope, as Job did, when we are unable to see why God is allowing us to suffer?

### Sufferings Can Come from God

If we want to understand why God allows us to suffer, we must see things from His perspective. *What lesson does God want me to learn from this situation?* To help us answer this question, we must quieten our hearts and seek God’s will from the Bible. When we learn more about God, then the anxieties at the back of our mind—*Will I recover from my illness? Will I die?*—will be replaced by a peace-filled hope in the promise of God, in His wisdom and His perfect will for us.

However, it is not always easy to



“If we want to understand why God allows us to suffer, we must see things from His perspective. What lesson does God want me to learn from this situation? To help us answer this question, we must quieten our hearts and seek God’s will from the Bible.”

fathom what God wants us to gain from our suffering. Eliphaz described God’s indecipherable ways to Job:

*“But as for me, I would seek God,  
And to God I would commit my cause—  
Who does great things, and  
unsearchable,  
Marvelous things without number.  
He gives rain on the earth,  
And sends waters on the fields.  
He sets on high those who are lowly,  
And those who mourn are lifted to  
safety.” (Job 5:8–9)*

This passage describes the sovereignty of God, and His prerogative to do whatever He chooses. He does not need to seek our approval or consult our opinions. This is why it can be difficult for us, with our limited intelligence, to comprehend His will. So how should we proceed?

### THE NEED TO PONDER

In the Book of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher tells us that in times of suffering, we need to ponder (Eccl 7:14). But the way we ponder and reflect is crucial. We might focus solely on our own weaknesses, and get trapped in an endless cycle of repentance and imploring God for His help. Or we might end up pitying ourselves and complaining against God, asking why He keeps adding to our burdens. This is why it is crucial

to look at things from the correct angle—not from our own point of view, but from God’s point of view.

First, we should consider—humbly and honestly—whether we have truly sinned. Have I offended God in the past week, or month, or year? Have I committed any unrighteous deeds or transgressed against God? This winter-long period of suffering means we may not be able to plough, plant or cultivate as we would in spring, but God has given us this time to reflect.

Next, we should take responsibility for our own actions and our own sin—do not question why others seem to go unpunished. It can be easy to blame others for our mistakes, or even to blame God by lamenting how unfair our situation is. But once we accept our fault, we will begin to understand why we are suffering and what God wants us to do. And when we go before God and lay the burden of our sin down, we will—almost miraculously—be brought into His promised peace. Our suffering may not end immediately, but we will be able to find rest and wait out the winter with hope.

### Suffering Because of God’s Chastisement

The author of Hebrews tells us that we ought to give thanks when we are chastised by God through trials: “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit





*you shall answer Me.  
"I have heard of You by the hearing  
of the ear,  
But now my eye sees You.  
Therefore I abhor myself,  
And repent in dust and ashes."  
(Job 42:2–6)*

Because of the sufferings he endured, Job was finally able to see God with his own eyes, and gained a renewed understanding of God and his own lowliness. Afterwards, God restored Job's losses and blessed him even more.

### Suffering for Christ

Suffering is part of the human experience. But for Christians, we know that we do not suffer without reason—whether we are being chastened for sinning, being perfected through trials, or bringing glory to God. Apostle Paul comforted the church in Thessalonica because they had endured many trials since believing in Christ. He wrote:

*We sent Timothy to you comfort you so that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.*

*(1 Thess 3:3–4)*

Despite being persecuted for believing in Christ, the Thessalonica members did not abandon their beliefs. They understood that anyone who chose to believe in the Lord must suffer in this way. Paul reminded them that suffering is part and parcel of discipleship, so they should comfort one another and wait on the Lord. In fact, those who suffer wrongfully for the sake of righteousness will be commended and blessed by God (1 Pet 2:19–20; 3:14).

Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33). The people of the world will face sufferings, but they will not have

of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb 12:11). Just as a father disciplines his son out of love, our heavenly Father chastises us so that we can partake in His holiness. Although we must suffer for a time, the benefits are everlasting (Heb 12:9–10).

Chastisement is never pleasant, and is often painful. But once we realize that our suffering is a result of our sin, then we should repent and return to God. Then we will see the love and grace of Jesus throughout our suffering, and know that it was not futile. If we confess our sins, God is faithful, and will forgive and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9). As long as it is not a mortal sin which leads to death, such as murder, sexual immorality, etc., the blood of Christ will cleanse us. This does not mean that we can be baptized again, but that, after baptism, the cleansing

should be revealed in him" (Jn 9:3).

Sometimes we suffer trials and tribulations so that the glory of God can be manifested in us. When a believer has victory over illness through faith—either being healed or being able to accept his condition—those who hear his testimony and witness his inner peace are led to the Lord. Besides, since trials are from God, who are we to complain? Instead, we should ponder what God wants us to achieve through the trials we are facing, or what we can bring to God at the end of the day.

When suffering comes, not only should we seek to understand why we are experiencing it, we should face it with courage. We should not run away from it or complain about the situation. Although we might not be able to understand the will of God when we are in the midst of suffering, we are able to face it because we have

faith in God.

Just like Job said, at the end of his ordeal:

*"I know that You can do everything,  
And that no purpose of Yours can be  
withheld from You.  
You asked, 'Who is this who hides  
counsel without knowledge?'  
Therefore I have uttered what I did  
not understand,  
Things too wonderful for me, which I  
did not know.  
Listen, please, and let me speak;  
You said, 'I will question you, and*

God has His purpose for putting us through this harsh winter period—He hopes for us to realize our sin and repent, to become more perfect, and to bring glory to His name

power of Jesus' blood is in effect whenever we are willing to humble ourselves and repent (Heb 7:24–25).

### Suffering to Manifest God's Glory

Although we sin (1 Jn 1:10), suffering is not always a result of God's chastisement. In the Gospel of John, it records the healing of a man who was born blind (Jn 9:1–7). The disciples asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (Jn 9:2). Jesus replied, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God



the peace that faith in Jesus brings.

**CONCLUSION**


There will be times when sufferings come upon us, like the winter rain and snow. It may seem that we suffer for no reason, causing us to grumble. But God has His purpose for putting us through this harsh winter period— He hopes for us to realize our sin and repent, to become more perfect, and to bring glory to His name, yielding “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Heb 12:11).

If we tackle our situation head on and ponder on the cause of our sufferings, then we will find that the springtime of spiritual revival will soon arrive. Even if we are facing the worst-case scenario of impending death, we can face it without fear.

May the Lord grant us such faith, so that when we meet with life challenges, we can remain in the Lord Jesus and endure our sufferings with an inner peace, knowing that after winter comes the beauty of spring. ★

## Five Loaves and Two Fish

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### Forgiving One Another

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*“Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.” (Col 3:13)*

Because of our human nature, there’s probably someone out there that we just can’t get along with. Forgiveness can be difficult when intense pain has been caused by wrongdoings. It is so hard for us to forgive and forget. Even though we try to forgive, those hurtful thoughts may keep creeping up in our minds. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we need to stop our fights or arguments, ask God for healing, and learn to forgive and forget. If not, we won’t have inner peace. Worst of all, if we do not forgive, just as God in Christ also has forgiven us, God will not forgive us (Mt 6:15).

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This entry was posted in Bible Study, Exhortation, Spiritual Growth and tagged bitterness, forgiveness, hatred, relationship on March 9, 2017 by tjcsln.

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*“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31-32)*

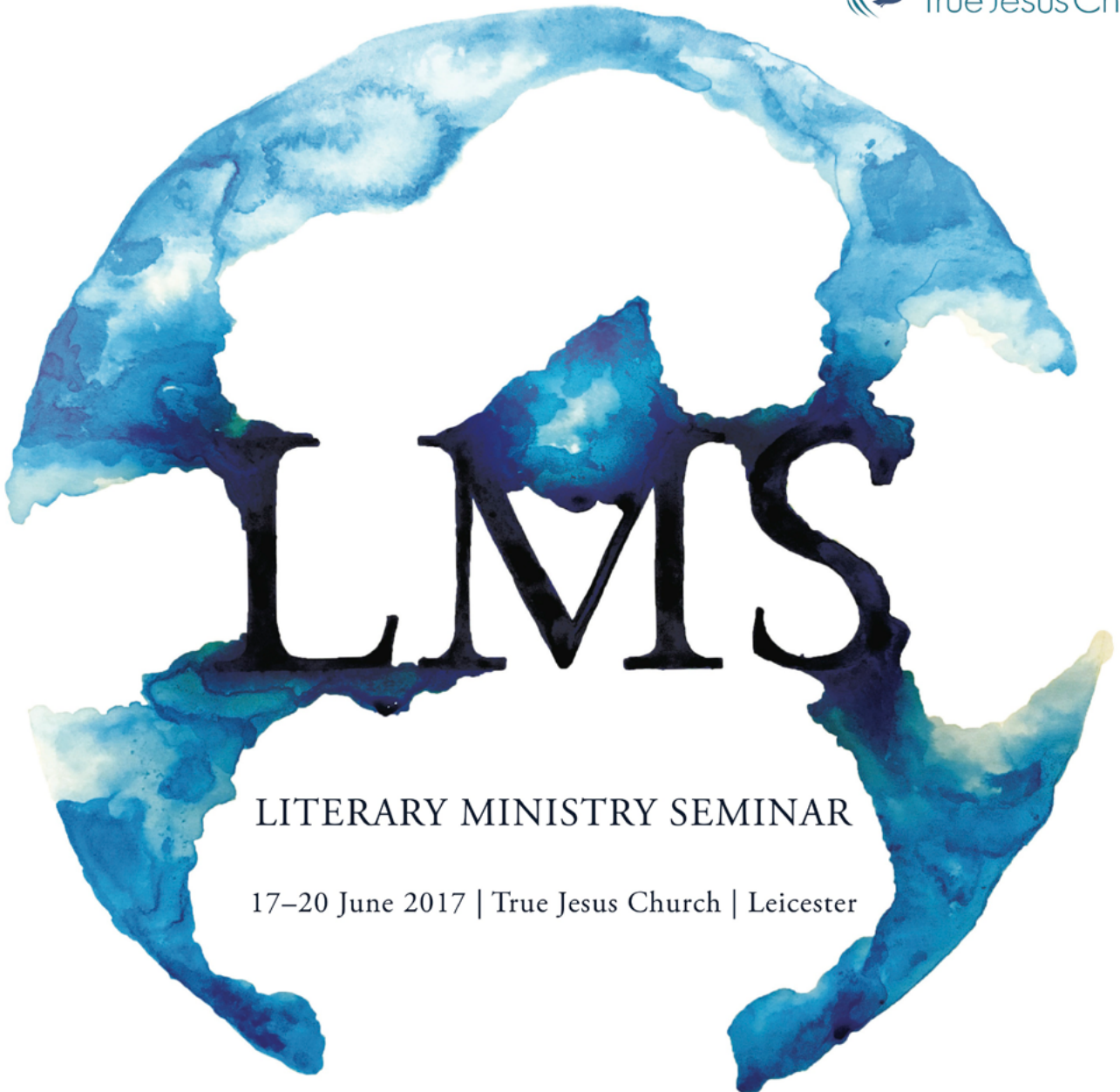
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## The Dwelling Place Where God Has Chosen to Establish His Name (II)

KC Tsai—Toronto, Canada

*Editor's note: In part one, we discovered that God first chose Shiloh as the dwelling place in which He established His name, where the Israelites would gather to worship and offer sacrifices to the Lord. This centralized organization would ensure that the faith could be preserved and passed down, unadulterated, to the future generations. However, because Israel became spiritually corrupt, God forsook Shiloh—a situation which prefigured the departure of the Holy Spirit from the apostolic church. In this concluding part, we see how, despite man's failings, God's desire to dwell among men will be fulfilled.*

### ENTER JERUSALEM

Since the time of Eli's death, when the ark of covenant was captured by the Philistines and God departed from the tabernacle in Shiloh, Israel no longer had a center of faith in which to worship God (1 Sam 4:1, 18; Ps 78:60–61; Jer 7:12–15). But because of David's faithfulness, God would once again have a dwelling place among His people: Jerusalem would become the city of the great King (Mt 5:35).

It was here that Solomon built the temple of God, according to his father's instructions. When the temple was completed, the priests carried the ark of God from the stronghold of Zion into the new structure. It was then that the glorious light of God filled the temple, such that the priests who were consecrated to serve the Lord could not continue ministering.

In that moment, the Holy Spirit moved Solomon to recall God's promise to David:

*"Since the day that I brought My people out of the land of Egypt, I have chosen no city from any tribe of Israel in which to build a house, that My name might be there, nor did I choose any man to be a ruler over My people Israel. Yet I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name may be there, and I have chosen David to be over My people Israel."*

(2 Chr 6:5–6)

After Shiloh, the temple at Jerusalem became the choice of God. And God promised to fulfill Solomon's request, made during the temple's dedication, to hear the prayers made in this place:

*"Now My eyes will be open and My ears attentive to prayer made in this place. For now I have chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually."*

(2 Chr 7:15–16)

It was in Jerusalem that God taught the people and led them in their faith, where He enabled them to serve and draw near to Him. This city became the center of worship, where the people would come to observe the three main festivals every year. And no matter where they may be, the people would face Jerusalem during their prayers, believing that God would hear them when they pray in this manner (2 Chr 6:20–21, 34–35; Dan 6:10; Ps 5:7).

God established Jerusalem for the sake of David, a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22; 1 Kgs 15:4). But the majority of the kings who came after David did not abide by the teachings of God. The faith of the people became insincere—outwardly, they would worship at the temple, but inwardly they had idols in their hearts (Jer 7:8–11). When Israel was later divided into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, in 930 BC, the nation of Judah still had Jerusalem.



### Teaching 5: The Need to Understand God

In the Bible, we see how God's chosen people had God's favor, but failed to keep it. He gave up Shiloh and Jerusalem, and also departed from the apostolic church established through the early (autumn) rain of the Holy Spirit. Through these events, God is teaching His church today to understand His heart, to know this gracious, loving God who abides by His covenant. We know what He esteems and what He abhors, as well as the consequences of men not abiding by the covenant. From the failure of the elect, we learn that it is imperative for us to abide daily by the new covenant, established by the Lord Jesus' blood, into which we have entered. Only through pursuing a life of faith pleasing to God will we be able to enjoy His enduring love and grace.

But on the eve of Judah's capture by the Babylonians, God pronounced this warning through Jeremiah:

*"But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. And now, because you have done all these works," says the LORD, "and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you, but you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to this place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh."*

(Jer 7:12–14)

God had decided to depart, once again, from His dwelling place among men—the physical temple at Jerusalem.

### SCATTERED AMONG THE LANDS

Before the Israelites entered the promised land, God reiterated the instructions that the people should follow. This was to remind them that they were the people of God, and if they obey His commands and abide by His laws in the promised land, they would be blessed; otherwise, they would be cursed (Deut 27:9–28:68). The ultimate punishment for disobedience would be exile among the peoples of the earth (Deut 28:64).

As the Israelites achieved victory after victory and claimed the land of Canaan for themselves, the idea of being scattered among the nations must have seemed a distant threat. But as time wore on, and the faithfulness of the people waxed and waned, that threat became more of a distinct possibility. In the final days before Judah fell to the Babylonians, Prophet Jeremiah repeatedly warned of the ensuing punishment (Jer 15:4; 24:9; 29:18; 34:17). But even he was unprepared for the horrors he witnessed when the prophecy came to pass. As the armies of Babylon massacred and looted Jerusalem, tore down the city wall, burned the temple, and captured the people, Jeremiah understood that Babylon was merely

God's tool. It was God who personally tore down His city and His temple (Lam 2:1–8).

*"I will deliver them to trouble into all the kingdoms of the earth, for their harm, to be a reproach and a byword, a taunt and a curse, in all places where I shall drive them."*  
(Jer 24:9)

This was the beginning of the diaspora of the Jews—the result of forsaking the covenant they made in the land of Moab (Deut 28:36–37). But no one could have predicted that, through this, God was actually paving the way of salvation for all nations.

Since the Jews were removed from their homeland, they were no longer able to make their journey of "ascension" to Jerusalem for worship. But in exile, the Jews began to pray towards the city of the great King. The first Jewish synagogue was established in about the 2nd century BC, followed by synagogues throughout Gentile lands. They were like oases in the desert, where the Jews could congregate to sing hymns and pray towards Jerusalem, thus bringing to pass the supplication of Solomon (2 Chr 6:36–39).

### Teaching 6: The Church in the Hearts of Men

Today we serve God in spirit and in truth; we no longer need to face Jerusalem in prayer. In retrospect, when the elect lost their footing (Rom 11:11), it did not deplete the glory of God, or hinder His salvation grace. In fact, God often brings forth His higher will amid the failures of men. Through the rebellion, exile and diaspora of the elect, God brought His dwelling place, in which He has chosen to establish His name, out of Jerusalem.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. (Jn 4:21–23)

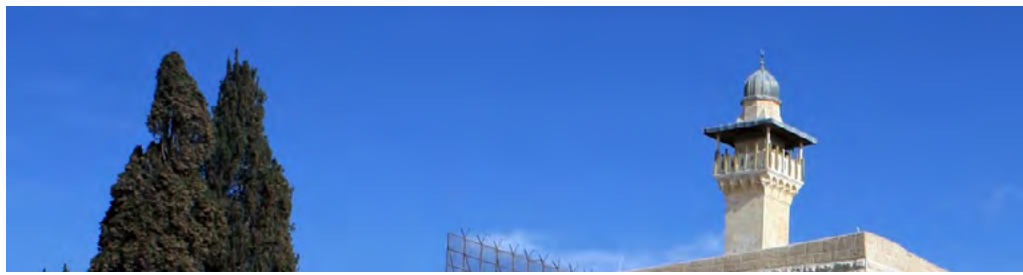
God's dwelling place among men is no longer the physical temple in Jerusalem, nor is it of the world. Rather, God has chosen to establish His name and His dwelling place in the hearts of men.

*Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

(1 Cor 6:19–20)

## THE INTER-TESTAMENTAL YEARS

In this ever-changing world, God is silently preparing a path for the gospel to reach all nations. Prior to His sending of Paul and other workers to testify of God's grace to the Gentile nations, God planted Jewish synagogues wherever the Jews settled. These synagogues became evangelism strongholds for His servants. He also prepared a common language—Greek, which was the lingua franca throughout the Alexandrian and Roman empires—so that they would not encounter a language barrier when preaching. At the same time, Gentile believers were learning to observe the Sabbath and principles of God through the recitation of the Scriptures in the Jewish synagogues throughout the land (Acts 15:19–21).



encompassing the physical descendants of Abraham and the spiritual descendants of Abraham, countless mistakes have been committed by the elect of God. The Old Testament Israelites disobeyed God and committed idolatry; the New Testament Jews nailed Christ to the cross; the apostolic church abandoned the teachings of the kingdom of God. Yet, God's promise to Abraham at the beginning was, and is, fulfilled.

blessed through Abraham—through Abraham's descendants—He was able to fulfill this prophecy through the failure of His chosen people! The path of salvation is plotted inextricably throughout the complex history of humankind.

## THE TEMPLE OF GOD

*Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*

*(Eph 2:19–22)*

God chose not to dwell in the physical temple, built by man's hand, because the people within it did not serve Him single-mindedly. During that time, the Jewish people came to worship at the temple in the name of God, but in their daily lives they stole, murdered, committed adultery, swore falsely, burned incense to Baal, and walked after other gods (Jer 7:9–10). Eventually, God allowed the Babylonians to destroy the temple of Solomon in 586 BC. The second temple, the rebuilding of which was led by Zerubbabel, was also destroyed—burned by the Romans in AD 70.

The Lord Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews did not understand, saying, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" (Jn 2:19–21). The

*God's dwelling place among men is no longer the physical temple in Jerusalem, nor is it of the world. Rather, God has chosen to establish His name and His dwelling place in the hearts of men.*

When the Holy Spirit sent Barnabas and Paul from Antioch, their path had already been prepared. They entered the synagogues in the Gentile lands to share and discuss the gospel of the kingdom of God. When they were rejected by the Jews, they would turn to the Gentiles, and expound the truth in their shared language—Greek.

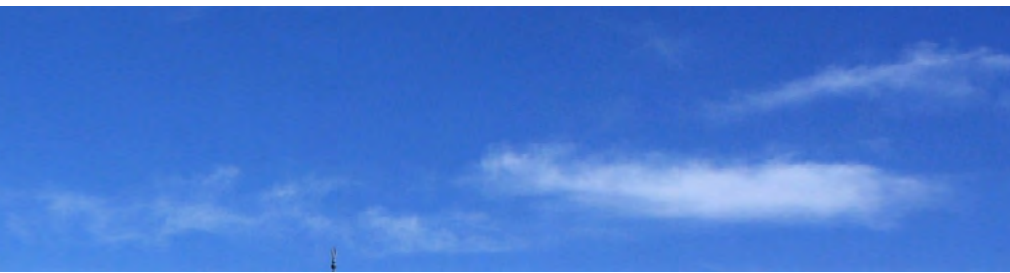
## UNFATHOMABLE GRACE

If we look to the beginning of the Israelite faith—the calling of Abraham—we can see just how unfathomable God's wisdom and grace are. God promised Abraham, "And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3b). This very promise was quoted by Peter to the Jews—the physical descendants of Abraham—to testify of Jesus (Acts 3:25). It was also later quoted by Paul to the Gentile believers—the spiritual descendants of Abraham—to affirm the truth of justification by faith (Gal 3:8–9).

During the stretch of history

Throughout the Old Testament, God repeated the promise that all nations would be blessed, proclaiming it to Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets (Gen 26:2–4; 28:14; Deut 32:43; Isa 2:2–3; 56:6–7; Mic 4:1–2). But judging by the spiritual state of God's people, the fulfillment of these prophecies seemed far from possible. Who could have known that the events which revealed the darkest hearts of men—the betrayal and crucifixion of the innocent Christ—would bring about the hope of their redemption through the shedding of blood? Up until the church was established by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, this mystery of how the blessing of God would come to all nations was hidden in God, but now the unsearchable wisdom and riches of God are manifested to man through the church (Eph 3:8–9).

When one views the works of God from this broad perspective, it invariably causes one to tremble in awe. Not only did He proclaim, well in advance, that all nations would be



Bible states that Jesus was actually speaking about the temple of His body.

Holy Spirit also shepherds the saints within the church, guides divine work, punishes wrongdoings (Acts 5:1–11),

”*God is able to accomplish His even more beautiful will through the failures of man. Through the destruction of the physical temple, He established the spiritual temple, which is His body, the saved true church. This is the dwelling place where He truly wants to establish His name.*

The physical temples were destroyed by the Babylonians and the Romans, yet the Lord Jesus said it was the Jews who “destroyed this temple.” Indeed, although the temple was destroyed physically by foreign invaders, spiritually, the temple was destroyed by the Jews through their unfaithfulness and their breaking of the covenant. But God is able to accomplish His even more beautiful will through the failures of man. Through the destruction of the physical temple, He established the spiritual temple, which is His body, the saved true church. This is the dwelling place where He truly wants to establish His name.

sends forth workers (Acts 13:1–4), and even alters their work plans (Acts 16:6–10). The church which is filled and personally led by the Holy Spirit is the biblical true church—the dwelling place of God, where He will place His name for ever. ★

*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.*

*(1 Cor 3:16–17)*

You are this temple! When believers who serve God in one accord gather to worship Him, they embody the temple of God. The spirit of God dwells within the church of God, He fills her with the Holy Spirit, and personally guides her forward. The





# Moses Returns to Egypt (I)

Adapted from sermons by Aun-Quek Chin—Singapore

## INFINITY VS. INFINITY

*“For man also does not know his time” (Eccl 9:12a).*

Few phrases exist in our vast literary canon that can scare the modern man as much as the seven words above. Pulsating in all of us is the urge to tame the unpredictable randomness stretched out before us. All of history has been a documentation of our efforts to satisfy this primitive urge to know our time. In this digital age, more than ever, we are terrified of losing our tight grip over the minutest aspect of our lives, and even our deaths. Tellingly, the advent of wearable virtual-reality technology brings this point home: we now even wish to conquer, and create, the worlds we inhabit. Every advancement in technology and science, from the

life-support machine to the field of genetic studies, is modern man’s indignant reply to Solomon: You are wrong, we do know our time, and in fact, we can even control it.

But perhaps the great teacher did not mean to frighten, only to warn.

What Solomon understood, as taught to him by God, was that some things will always be beyond man’s reach. Wielding the full force of statistical science in our hands, the most man can ever hope for is not to reduce randomness, but to prepare for it. The only certainty is death.

In stating that terse but bleak truth, Solomon warns us of the Christian who struts down the streets of life expecting to always know what lies ahead—what comes round the corner may surprise him, and send him flailing headlong into a crisis of faith. So if false optimism is not the answer,

surely we cannot simply accept the terrifying status quo! Even the most veteran church-going Christian can attest to the soul-wrenching experience of living in this state of constant uncertainty. Every tomorrow harbors untold horrors: Will I still have my job? What will the prognosis be? What will happen to my child?

While Solomon does not have any easy answers, Ecclesiastes 3:11 gives us piercing insight into our struggle with this existential anxiety:

*He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in [man’s] heart, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.*

This verse holds the key for the Christian paralyzed by fear of the unknowable future, and disheartened by life’s setbacks: wait for God’s time to come.

What is God’s time? God’s time is not an alternate dimension. It is also not a distant future when all sufferings will cease and everything is predictably perfect. God reveals to us, through Solomon’s handsome prose, that “God’s time” is the eternity He

“God’s time” is the eternity He has given us—the profound human awareness of, and unquenchable thirst for, beauty and goodness that has no end. This consummate clarity comes with having a relationship with the infinite God.

has given us—the profound human awareness of, and unquenchable thirst for, beauty and goodness that has no end. This consummate clarity comes with having a relationship with the infinite God.

Oddly, the verse marries this empowering fact with a sombre reminder of our overwhelming ignorance in light of God's omniscience. Why? Because, in Christianity, faith buoyed by knowledge and experience is important. But, as our current anxieties prove to us, we will never know or experience enough, especially about our futures, to give us peace. Therefore, our only solace is in a faith that is comfortable with all uncertainties because it is intimate with one certainty: that trust in God and His word is all we need. Solomon, again, helps us with a summary in Proverbs 19:21: "There are many

let me go and return to my brethren who are in Egypt, and see whether they are still alive" (Ex 4:18b).

A puzzling observation: why did Moses seek to gain permission from his father-in-law when he had already received divine sanction from his Father-in-heaven to leave for Egypt?

The custom of the ancients was for a man to seek permission from the head of his tribe before he set off on a long journey away from home. Moses knew that performing this Midianite tradition was a risk. What if Jethro denied his request? Moses would no doubt still be resolved to complete his mission, but at what cost? Would Jethro have sought to sabotage his quest? If his meeting with Pharaoh did not go to plan, would Moses be endangering the lives of his family? Would he lose the land and the people he had learned to call home? Moses

that flows from a deep trust in the divine. Hosea, the prophet renowned for obeying God's command to marry a prostitute, knew firsthand what it meant to relinquish control to the Lord and trust fully in His plan, no matter what. So when Hosea relays sage advice in Hosea 12:6, telling us to "[o]bserve mercy and justice, and wait on your God continually," we ought to take it to heart. Hosea is telling us that waiting on the Lord requires us to embody certain Christian virtues. It requires us to be kind and fair, to be a positive moral influence on the people we encounter on our walk of faith.

Take, for instance, the issue of church work. Church affairs tend to arouse intense sentiment because, quite rightly, many of us take matters of faith seriously. Breaking sacred tablets, carelessly striking rocks, delivering robe-ripping public prayers—Moses regularly demonstrated how emotional and affective the journey of faith can be. As human as Moses was then, so are we today. So when we find our ideas and contributions obstructed by this or that person or committee, the uncertainty piles on and, in our frustration, we may lash out at our co-workers-in-Christ. We allow our fear of losing control to dictate actions we later regret, hurting the harmonious order of God's church in the process.

Man is a strong-headed and quarrelsome animal, and changing is hard. But to believe in God's time is to demonstrate a trusting self-restraint; as long as we are faithful to God's will, we need not charge head-first against the ordered customs of church and community. Paul puts it best in 1 Corinthians 14:33, reminding us that "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace," continuing in verse 40 to advise that "all things be done decently and in order." If Hosea and Moses understood that being respectful, forgiving and, most of all, patient, would not impede God's work but enrich it all the more, then it would behoove us to do the same.

*“Moses understood the first truth about God’s time: to truly believe in it, we have to abandon our compulsion to control everything in our lives, and take refuge in the only certainty we need—that God has a plan.”*

plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the LORD's counsel—that will stand." If worldly chaos seems endless, then God intends for us to fight endlessness with eternity, infinity with infinity.

Of course, such things are easy to say, but often hard to do. Which is why we turn our eyes to Moses, to a time before the advanced scientific and technological achievements we now enjoy, to see how Christians today can live full lives by holding on to the promise of God's time.

### ALL IN GOOD TIME

Although Moses possessed an impressive organizational mind, what truly made him excel as the chosen messenger of God had less to do with his clear-headed planning and more with his trust in God's time over his instincts.

The first thing Moses did after his famous encounter with God at the burning bush was to plead with Jethro, his Midianite father-in-law: "Please

could not have hoped to predict the outcome. So why did he take such a risk?

Moses understood the first truth about God's time: to truly believe in it, we have to abandon our compulsion to control everything in our lives, and take refuge in the only certainty we need—that God has a plan. How does this translate in practice?

We fear the unknown so much that we fight for every bit of control we can possibly get, even if it means souring friendships or injuring the feelings of loved ones along the way. This is what would have happened had Moses, in all the splendor of his great calling and mission from God, marched straight off to Egypt. To Moses, the numerous risks faded into irrelevance because he believed that God had His time and His plan. God would not allow His work to be compromised by Moses' simple desire to be sensitive to the feelings of his loved ones.

This is a unique kind of patience

### MORE THAN WE KNOW

The popular historical film Schindler's

List tells the moving story of a former pro-Nazi German businessman who ends up saving over a thousand Jewish lives during the Holocaust. It is, as the cliché goes, the story of an ordinary man doing extraordinary things in extraordinary times.

Moses was one of the first “Schindlers” of the ancient world. Before his brush with God at the burning bush, the only responsibilities Moses had were to his family and livestock in uneventful Midian. Then all of a sudden, the fate of an entire nation was thrust into the untested hands of this simple shepherd. Moses was standing, rod in hand, at the brink of history. Moses was scared—of that we can be sure. Though he trusted in God’s time at first, his nerves got the better of him. Moses was probably paralyzed by fear—for all his fervor and faith, he had yet to begin the long trek to Egypt. But God understood. And so on His second visit to Moses, God reassured him, “Go, return to Egypt; for all the men who sought your life are dead” (Ex 4:19). This gave Moses the courage to return to Egypt.

This is a heartening depiction of the second truth about the nature of God’s time. The concept of God’s time, while seemingly lofty and high-minded, actually means that God is heavily involved with our private insecurities. And because God knows



important in our lives, unexpected burdens and anxieties may visit us. As we survey the innumerable problems before us, we ask the universal questions of suffering: *Why me? Why now? What next?*

God had great plans for Moses. He has great plans for us today (Eph 2:10). The problem with great plans is that they often carry too many unknowns. Somehow, Christians are buoyed by this constant feeling that they are meant to do some good in their lives. What holds many well-intentioned believers back from rising to the occasion is the fear of uncertainty. Often, these are uncertainties about individual ability: *What can I actually contribute on the missionary trip? Can I really lead a Bible study? What if I get a question I can't answer when I start preaching?* We drown out our extraordinary calling with our self-perceived ordinariness.

The truth is, we can never predict whether our gambles will pay off, like Schindler’s, or if miserable failure

will to us. Humans are naturally stubborn, and when we choose not to see something, we close both eyes. We refuse to accept that God cares about our talents, and pass up the opportunity, as Queen Esther almost did, to serve God when He calls.

Therefore, to believe in God’s time is to believe in three things: firstly, that God knows more about our own abilities than we do; secondly, that we have to be sensitive to God’s calling through frequent prayer and Bible-reading; and thirdly, when the call comes, we should have the courage to rise to meet our destinies. A fear of the uncertain has no place in the heart of the Christian who heeds these words: “Commit your works to the LORD, and your thoughts will be established. The LORD has made all for Himself” (Prov 16:3–4a).

Another interesting observation is that Moses surely had more worries on his mind than the one which God assuaged. Why was one pithy consolation enough to bolster Moses? Because that one divine remark reminded him that God knew his anxieties, and that he had no cause to worry for God was with him every step of the way. The Christian does not need to know all his troubles are gone. Sometimes, all we need is a little nudge.

### EVERYONE’S WAITING

Sadly, even in matters of faith there is no panacea. Believing in God’s time is not a solution to all our problems. It is hard work. Most times, waiting is not enough, because we wait for earthly time to pass, thinking that God’s plan has a schedule just like our plans. This is wrong; God, unlike the clock, is living. There are two things about waiting on God’s time that we must

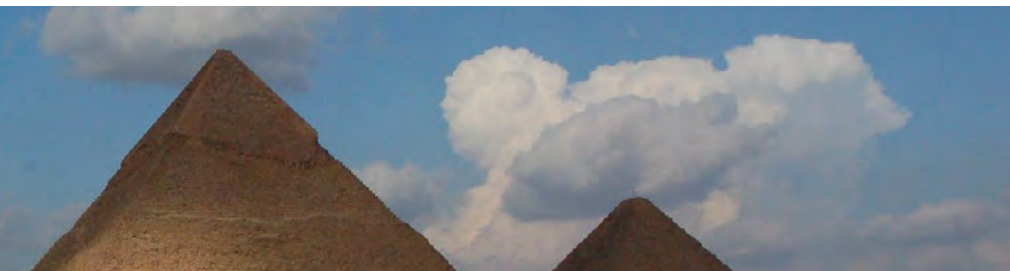
“God does not promise quick and easy solutions. He delivers us today, and tests us tomorrow. Some trials in our lives make sense not because time passes and they disappear, but because our belief in God’s bigger plan and time reveals to us that we needed those trials to become better Christians.”

all our concerns, He never gives us more than we can handle. Time, as we know it—coldly measured in minutes and seconds, months and years—is unforgiving and cruel in its relentless onward march. God’s time is different; God cares about our feelings and worries, and yearns to help us along.

As it was with Moses, just as we are about to embark on something truly

awaits us. But that’s alright, because believing in God’s time means knowing is beside the point. What matters is that God knows, and that God reveals in His own special way. God knew the one big thing that was bothering Moses, and gave him the chance to regain his confidence to rise to the call. The tricky part is how God reveals His grace and





remember.

Firstly, we have to be able to accept that suffering and problems will not disappear just because we believe in God's eventual deliverance. Moses could brandish his miracle-rod all he wanted, but his supernatural feats could not intimidate the mighty Pharaoh. Even after their escape across the Red Sea, miracle after astounding miracle could not satisfy the children of Israel. God does not promise quick and easy solutions. He delivers us today, and tests us tomorrow. Some trials in our lives make sense not because time passes and they disappear, but because our belief in God's bigger plan and time reveals to us that we needed those trials to become better Christians. For instance, Apostle Paul pleaded bitterly for his thorn to be removed, and he waited. It was not the passing of time that helped him make sense of his pains. It was his belief in God's time and plan for him that helped him understand why he suffered so (2 Cor 12:7), inspiring the unforgettable Pauline hymn to godly trust: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9b). Therefore, we wait with a hope not of a paradise on earth, but of the paradise beyond, and a trust in the God who dwells there.

Secondly, and what comes as most surprising, is that as much as we think we are waiting for God, most times God is waiting for us. A common habit of man is to recollect all the events of his past and play god, thinking, If this had happened here instead of there, if that had been postponed till then, then things would be better. The crucial difference between our imagination and God is omniscience. We can mentally rearrange our past to fit an

ideal chronology, but we do so in the darkness of our ignorance. We have to trust that God knows the rightful time for all things—from the blooming of a flower, to the death of Jesus (Rom 5:6), everything happens according to His appointed time. And that means if something we know to be good, to be holy, pure and righteous eludes us, then perhaps the problem is not the extent of our patience, but how we fill our time while we wait. When we seem to be mired in our problems, unable to make any progress or find any reprieve despite our earnest prayers, we ought to remember that waiting upon the Lord is not to have a sit-around-do-nothing faith. It means taking concrete steps toward becoming a better Christian. Often, God also wishes to use such tests of

“What Moses has taught us, in his evolution from faint-hearted to faith-hearted, is that patience and trust will never disappoint us. Uncertainty will persist, but it must not prevail. God has His time, and it is ordered, not chaotic; compassionate, not indifferent; active, not lazy.”

endurance to remind us to lean on Him as we walk with Him.

It is impossible to dispute that Moses' faith had grown tremendously after his ten-plague-long encounter with Pharaoh. Why did God have to send ten plagues, not one, or five,

or seven? These become redundant questions when we remember that trusting in God and His time frees us from needing to know all the answers. Likewise, when God withholds the Holy Spirit from the earnest forty-year believer, for instance, we are understandably puzzled. Perhaps there are things for that Christian to learn; perhaps he is not yet truly hungry for the Spirit; perhaps, perhaps, perhaps. These speculations do not matter. What matters is the eternity within us that remembers—however long we have to pray on earth is negligible, for we will gain infinity in heaven.

### CONCLUSION

"Wait on the LORD," sings the sweet psalmist. "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!" (Ps 27:14).

It may well be that we will never know our future. When all we need is a reliable peek into what lies ahead, our statistics, algorithms, and machines may fail us. What Moses has taught us, in his evolution from faint-hearted to faith-hearted, is that patience and trust will never disappoint us. Uncertainty will persist, but it must not prevail. God has His time, and it is ordered, not chaotic; compassionate, not indifferent; active, not lazy. And as long as we are aware of the great eternity within us as we walk our Christian journey, the victory will be ours.

*"But those who wait on the LORD  
Shall renew their strength;  
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
They shall run and not be weary,  
They shall walk and not faint."  
(Isa 40:31) ★*

# The Seventh Blessing in the End Time

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## INTRODUCTION

The Book of Revelation, for all its vivid chronicling of the apocalyptic drama of the end times, has much to say regarding blessings as well. The phrase “blessed is/are the” occurs seven times in the book, in much the same fashion as the Beatitudes of Jesus. Unlike the Beatitudes, however, these blessings are scattered throughout the Book of Revelation and can only be identified after a thorough reading of the entire book.

Of the seven blessings, we shall study the final one, recorded in Revelation 22:14–15. This blessing came during a very pressing time; the preceding verses help us understand what a critical moment this was:

*Then he said to me, “These words are faithful and true.” And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place.*

(Rev 22:6)

This verse illuminates the exigency and gravitas of the situation, as God affirms the “faithful and true” insights He has shown John, and hastens to spread news of the prophecies

“God’s words are faithful and true, and His unfailing promises in the Book of Revelation are for us to study and cherish, that we may stand prepared for His return.

which are “shortly” to come to pass. Additionally, verse 7 contains Jesus’ terse declaration, “Behold, I am coming quickly!” This further punctuates the urgency underlying the final blessing.

Throughout the Bible, God’s prophets never fail to remind us that the end of all things is always on the horizon; and it is in these perilous, fleeting times that we must turn once more to the enduring truths in the Bible’s last book. God’s words are faithful and true, and His unfailing promises in the Book of Revelation are for us to study and cherish, that we may stand prepared for His return.

## SEALING AND UNSEALING

God underscores the significance of Revelation’s message in His instructions, relayed by His angel, to Elder John:

*And he said to me, “Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book,*

*for the time is at hand. He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still.” (Rev 22:10–11)*

God intends for the prophecy to be a public announcement to all creation. By instructing the scribe, Elder John, to leave “the words of the prophecy of this book” unsealed, God is also instructing future generations of Christians to seize upon every word of these prophecies and study them diligently while time is still on their side. This divine command to unveil the precious truths of Revelation stands in contrast to the command given to Daniel, at a time when he too was a recipient of God’s grand revelations. Daniel was told,

*“But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro,*

and knowledge shall increase.”

(Dan 12:4)

What was revealed to Daniel was as much a mystery to him as it would have been to anyone who read them during his time. Yet when Daniel, in the throes of his confusion, asked,

*Although I heard, I did not understand. Then I said, “My lord, what shall be the end of these things?”*

(Dan 12:8),

God replied, definitively:

*“Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.”*

(Dan 12:9)

It was not yet time for the truth of the end times to be revealed. Hence, Daniel did not get his answer. God’s advice to “Go your way” can be read as an invitation for Daniel to retire from his earthly quest. The “end” to which God referred is the same end that Revelation speaks of.

By comparing these two episodes, when God spoke first to Daniel and then to Elder John centuries later about the last days, God’s intricate plan becomes clear: today, what was once sealed is sealed no longer. The profound mysteries that were once veiled to Daniel have been declared openly to all who belong to the Lord today, for He desires to reach out and save those who would answer the call.

We would be foolish to ignore the insights for which Daniel had so ardently and—having fasted three weeks as he sought his answers—hungered for, but couldn’t obtain.

## UNDERSTANDING

God had warned Daniel of an ominous future:

*“Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.”* (Dan 12:10)

Today, the True Jesus Church Christian lives in the age about which Daniel had been solemnly forewarned.

Just as the verse implies, God in His boundless grace has revealed the truths recorded in Revelation to man. What complicates God’s gift of grace to us is how we, in our capacities as moral creatures, behave.

Blindness to God’s message is not just the result of our explicit refusal to accept God. Many remain oblivious to the mysteries of God simply by living a life in which God exists only at the periphery, or is otherwise completely absent. To not consider God and His laws in our day-to-day life is to forfeit any chance of gaining the wisdom necessary to grasp the meaning of His mysteries.

” *Blindness to God’s message is not just the result of our explicit refusal to accept God. Many remain oblivious to the mysteries of God simply by living a life in which God exists only at the periphery, or is otherwise completely absent.*

## AS WHITE AS SNOW

On to the final blessing:

*“Blessed are those who wash their robes<sup>1</sup> that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.”*

(Rev 22:14)

Heavy with symbolic meaning, the last blessing in Revelation has much to teach us. Even the linguistic construction of the blessing is worthy of note.

We turn first to the word “wash.” The Greek word translated as “wash” in the verse is rarely used in the Bible. In fact, it occurs only three times in the entire Bible, and only once outside of Revelation. What makes it unique is the specific function of the word, which was commonly applied in reference to the washing of fishermen’s nets. These fishing nets were large, heavy pieces of equipment that required multiple men to clean. The use of this word in Revelation to refer to the washing of garments thus becomes incredibly intriguing. Why

the use of this lexicographical rarity instead of the more conventional and suitable word for the washing of garments?

A different kind of washing is used because the blessing is also speaking of a different kind of garment. Firstly, in a biblical context, “robes” do not merely refer to physical outerwear. It is to be understood, in a spiritual context, as the garment acquired during baptism. To borrow from Apostle Paul, these robes are put on in the same sense as our “putting on” of Christ (Rom 13:14) when we enter into the promise of salvation.

Secondly, the significance of the special word for “wash” becomes clear when we understand what these robes actually signify. Just as great effort and care were required to wash the heavy fishing nets, the same is needed to maintain the purity and righteousness of our election in the Lord—a responsibility that demands hard work and perseverance.

## ROBES, TREES AND GATES

### Robes

More can be unearthed while studying the “robes” of the final blessing.

*And they cried with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.*

(Rev 6:10–11)

The robes mentioned in this moving passage give us a clue as to what the

<sup>1</sup> NU-Text reads “who wash their robes.” Also translated as “who do His commandments.”



“One must come out of great tribulation in order to receive these white robes, and have the blood of the Lamb to wash their robes until they become white. One has to wash his own robes. While the robe is a gift, a grace, it is not something one receives without effort.

robes mentioned in the final blessing may also represent. The robes spoken of here are hard-earned symbols of honor, won and worn by persecuted Christians who had remained faithful till the very end.

Exiled in Patmos for his beliefs, the author of Revelation knew very well how much this meant. Back in Rome, his fellow Christian brethren were also languishing under imperial persecution. Suffering was not far from the faithful followers of Christ.

Moreover, the white robes were donned by the “great multitude” as they stood before the throne and the Lamb (Rev 7:9). This special crowd, as explained in verses 13–14 of the same chapter, were those who had emerged from great tribulation victorious in Christ, and who had “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” One must come out of great tribulation in order to receive these white robes, and have the blood of the Lamb to wash their robes until they become white. One has to wash his own robes. While the robe is a gift, a grace, it is not something one receives without effort. When we put on Christ at baptism, the garment we receive is given freely to us without any effort or merit on our part—not because we are lovable or worthy. But the white robe in Revelation requires that we come out of the great tribulation to obtain it.

Whatabout us? Can we see ourselves within the “great multitude”? It is useful for Christians to take a step back every now and again to take stock of our lives of faith. In all our years in Christ’s fold, we are sure to have met with affliction. Yet we often fail to appreciate the significance of our simple victories: after all this time, we still attend services, sing hymns,

pray, and do our bit in church work. These are accomplishments, marking our steadfast refusal to bow to the troubles the world throws at us.

#### Trees

Returning to Revelation 22:14, we turn to the last portion of the blessing: “...that they may have the right to the tree of life.”

A literal translation of the Greek would give us “authority over the tree of life.” God’s elect, the “great multitude,” possesses the power to obtain the tree of life and its fruit. To understand what the tree of life is, we can consult Proverbs. The tree of life is wisdom (Prov 3:13–18), and, according to Proverbs 11:30,

*The fruit of the righteous  
is a tree of life,  
And he who wins souls is wise.*

Wisdom is the immeasurable prize, worthy of all our troubles. After our baptism of fire—the variety of trials set in our way—we don our white robes and are bestowed with the gift of gifts: true wisdom. At the close of our long and troubled lives, this is our victory—the tree of life within, and eternal life.

#### Gates

The final blessing ends with the elect’s admission into the city. All that stands between us and the treasures of heaven, and what we need to pass through, is a gate. There is no other way into the eternal holy city—no shortcuts, no secret entries. After we go through the gate, we will see a beautiful scene. In Revelation 21:10, the angel showed John the city, and the things within the city. This is the city that we can enter, through the city gate.

The final blessing in Revelation is followed by a bleak picture. In the end time, if we are not able to obtain the seventh blessing, it means that we have fallen short, and everything we have worked for in our lives will be lost. We cannot enter the city, and are left behind with the “dogs [i.e., heretics] and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie” (Rev 22:15).

This contrast highlights the ultimate importance of the final blessing. It is more than a bonus or a reward: it is a necessity. Only when we grasp this blessing and obtain it are we privy to the boundless treasures of salvation reserved for God’s children.

#### CONCLUSION

The Book of Revelation captures in vivid detail the universal experience of human suffering. That is man’s inescapable condition. Yet it also tells us of ultimate deliverance—the prize for the faithful Christian. Until this time comes, we must continue to grow in our faith, endure trials and tribulations, and steadfastly serve. As long as we do our part, the seventh blessing of Revelation will be given to us. At the end, we will enter through the city gate into the New Jerusalem, our promised land, as part of the “great multitude,” wearing white robes. ★



## We Shall Be Fruitful in the Land

Based on a sermon by Derren Liang—Irvine, California, USA

*And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."*  
(Gen 26:22)

When Isaac's conflict with the herdsmen of Gerar finally ended, he said, "We shall be fruitful in the land." This utterance was not only a statement of intent, but one that came to define his whole life.

Isaac was immensely blessed by God, but God's favor did not land on him by accident, or simply because he was the son of Abraham. Why, then, did Isaac gain God's favor?

### SAME FAMILY, DIFFERENT PATHS: ISAAC AND LOT

It is interesting, at this juncture, to compare the lives of Isaac and Lot. They both spent a significant portion of their lives with Abraham, who would have been a major influence on each of them as they were growing up. Lot travelled great distances with his uncle after they left their home country, and they shared the same faith. Similarly, Isaac was raised in his

father's faith, and witnessed firsthand how that faith was lived out.

However, Lot's story ended in tragedy. Even though he escaped from Sodom, he had lost everything: his wife had been turned into a pillar of salt, and his two daughters engaged in incest with him. Isaac's life was different. After his father died, he continued to be blessed by God. His desire to be "fruitful in the land" indeed came to pass.

For two persons who had shared the same mentor, Lot and Isaac could not have had more different lives. Why was Abraham's influence on each of them so different? If we look closely, we can see that the important distinction between the two is whether their choices were God-centered or self-centered.

When Lot and Abraham parted ways, Lot chose where to go by what looked pleasing to his eyes. He "saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere...like the

garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar" (Gen 13:10). Abraham, on the other hand, trusted in God's direction and His providence, walking the land given to him by the Lord (Gen 13:14–18). Away from Abraham's guidance, Lot chose to live among the cities of the plain (Gen 13:12). Even worse, he eventually settled in Sodom, despite its reputation as an extraordinarily wicked city (Gen 14:12; 13:13). Although the Bible describes Lot as a righteous man (2 Pet 2:7–8), he clearly did not prioritize his relationship with God when he settled in such a spiritually corrupt environment. The effects of this decision on Lot's family are well known (Gen 19).

In contrast, Isaac always put God's will above his own, even when Abraham had passed away and could no longer influence his decision-making. In Isaac's heart, the Lord would always be his Master, and so God blessed him.

”Isaac was immensely blessed by God, but God's favor did not land on him by accident, or simply because he was the son of Abraham. Why, then, did Isaac gain God's favor?



So how was Isaac's life blessed by God, and how can we also be fruitful in the land?

### ISAAC'S SUBMISSIVENESS

In every decision that Isaac made, he always considered God as the priority. Because his choices were pleasing to God, God would bless them. We can see that, by the way he lived his life, Isaac had a submissive faith.

Genesis 26:1 records that famine struck the land twice—once during Abraham's time, and another during Isaac's. The need to find food was a recurring and severe problem that had to be resolved. If our most basic needs—food, water, shelter—are not met, it can be difficult to believe that God loves us.

*“If Isaac remained in the land, he would be under daily pressure to find food for his household. If he moved, the pressure would be lifted. If he submitted to God, a long path of suffering laid ahead of him. Despite all this, Isaac submitted, with faith, and was indeed rewarded by God.”*

When Abraham was faced with famine in the land, he moved south to Egypt. This was an immediate solution to his problem but, clearly, this was not how God wanted him to deal with it. Likewise, the Book of Ruth records how, when there was a famine, the family of Elimelech and Naomi moved from Bethlehem to the land of Moab. This improved their situation, but God was not pleased—they had left Canaan, the promised land. Because of this, God withheld His blessings, and the three men in the family died. While the decision to move solved the immediate problem of lack of food, the decision itself resulted in an even greater problem.

When it was Isaac's turn to face famine, he wanted to do as his father did and move to Egypt. However, God instructed him not to:

*Then the LORD appeared to him and said: “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land of which I shall tell you. Dwell in this land, and I will*



*be with you and bless you; for to you and your descendants I give all these lands, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father.” (Gen 26:2–3)*

The Lord told Isaac: “Live in the land of which I shall tell you.” He promised that, if Isaac did so, He would be with him and bless him. But could Isaac

believe this? If Isaac remained in the land, he would be under daily pressure to find food for his household. If he moved, the pressure would be lifted. If he submitted to God, a long path of suffering laid ahead of him. Despite all this, Isaac submitted, with faith, and was indeed rewarded by God:

*Then Isaac sowed in that land, and reaped in the same year a hundredfold; and the LORD blessed him. The man began to prosper, and continued prospering until he became very prosperous. (Gen 26:12–13)*

This was a miracle that could only have come about through God's blessing. In dire circumstances, it is important to make decisions that please God, because then we can be sure that God will take care of us.

What kind of famine might we face today? It goes without saying that we need to work to earn money in order to live. If we cannot find employment, then it is as if we are facing a famine.

It is a problem that we must resolve. But the question is: where does God want me to find a job? We must put this in our hearts. When circumstances dictate that we need to relocate to find a job, then it is more important to consider where God wants us to go, rather than where we want to go. If we follow God's direction and do things according to His will, then He will take care of us. He will abide with us and bless us. But if we go somewhere He does not want us to go, we may find a good job, but we will experience a spiritual famine.

If we do all things according to God's principles, then God will abide with us and bless us. If we choose to follow our own choices at the expense of God's principles, then what we do will not be pleasing to the Lord. We may experience success in the short term but, without the presence of God, we will suffer in the long run.

### ISAAC'S SUFFICIENCY

Isaac's submissiveness and trust in God can also be seen in the incident of the wells. Genesis 26:18–22 records how they searched for water for themselves and their sheep, digging three wells in total.

*And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the names which his father had called them. (Gen 26:18)*

These wells had been passed down to Isaac by his father, but they had been stopped by the Philistines. After he had dug the first well, Isaac met with a challenge:





*But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they quarreled with him. (Gen 26:20)*

How would Isaac respond? How a person responds to such a trial would depend on whether he has God in his life. He who does not have God will react based on his own desires. In contrast, he who has God will consider what God would find pleasing, and do it. This is why Isaac conceded not only one well to the herdsmen, but two (Gen 26:21).

Why did Isaac do this, at the risk of appearing cowardly? He did it for peace and harmony. God does not want us to quarrel and make enemies, because God is love (1 Jn 4:8). Where God is, there is peace and joy.

In verse 22, we read that Isaac's third attempt at digging a well did not cause a dispute with the herdsmen:

*And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." (Gen 26:22)*

*Rehoboth* means "the Lord has made room for us." Indeed, this was a well from which water continuously flowed; a single well was sufficient for Isaac's household.

Today, some of us work two or three jobs, laboring day and night. We crave for the security of knowing that if we lose one of our jobs, we will have another to fall back on. We do not realize that, in fact, one well is sufficient. If we have the blessing of God, then having one job is enough

to support us. Working several jobs may give us more income and a greater sense of accomplishment, but will we have any time left for God? Abraham and Isaac understood the need to spend more time loving God and loving men. When we leave this world, if we have not done anything for God and for man, what legacy will we leave behind? If we have not left behind any good deeds, then our lives would have been wasted. Will anyone remember us, and most importantly, will God?

Isaac felt that Rehoboth would be sufficient, and would help them to be fruitful. We do not need many wells to be fruitful. If God is with us, then our well will be a living well, and we

*How do we respond to God's blessing? And if we do not react positively, what will God's response be in turn?*

will have more time to do what is pleasing to God.

### ISSAC'S LIFE BALANCE

In order to maintain a good life balance, Isaac had to maintain a good relationship with God. We see this played out in Genesis 26:24–25.

*And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake." So he built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well.*

We can often deduce the health of a marriage by looking at how the couple

respond to each other. If a husband loves and cherishes his wife, she will respond positively and reciprocate in kind; in this way, the relationship gradually improves. But if the couple respond negatively to each other, for example, reacting to a complaint with yet another complaint, then the marriage will gradually deteriorate.

Our relationship with God is the same. How do we respond to God's blessing? And if we do not react positively, what will God's response be in turn? In Isaac's case, he had been blessed with a harvest that was a hundredfold of what he sowed (Gen 26:12), and a living well. How did Isaac respond?

Firstly, he built an altar. Secondly, he pitched his tent there. And thirdly, he dug a well. These three actions represent the three main aspects of a balanced life: to build an altar is to call on the name of the Lord, that is, our life of worship; to pitch a tent represents our family life; and to dig a well, which is to supply water for the sheep, signifies our livelihood.

### Build an Altar

If we look at the three stages of Isaac's response, we will notice a very particular order. The first thing Isaac did was build an altar; this means that he put God first. For us, we can put God first by reserving some time for Him, and not allowing anything, or anyone, to take it away. The prime example is Sabbath day, which is a whole day dedicated to God. But aside from the Sabbath, we should keep some time to spend with God every day. When we wake up, we can pray to God to thank and praise Him, to ask for His guidance so that everything we do in the coming day may be pleasing to Him and according to His will. This time should also include reading the Bible and meditating on the word of God.

Spiritually, we have a father-child relationship with God. As with any

relationship, if we want to build and maintain a close bond, we must spend time with our heavenly Father. This is how we put God, and the worship of God, before everything else in our lives.

sure enough, found a third well. If we believe that God is with us, we need not worry if we lose our job, or get passed over for a role we applied for. We will eventually find another well—one that is sufficient for our needs.

”*Isaac’s faith shone through his actions—he put God’s will above his own judgment when making decisions, responded positively to God’s blessings, and believed that God’s grace would be sufficient for his needs.*

#### Pitch a Tent

The second step in responding to God’s blessing is to pitch our tent—to establish and care for our family. In some households, one of the parents—either the father or the mother—is the breadwinner, while the other is the primary carer for the family. But when circumstances, or preferences, dictate that both parents have to work, much planning and effort is needed to make sure the children are cared for, and can grow up in a stable and loving environment.

When children grow up without parental love and warmth at home, then problems arise. Such individuals will often feel that their hearts are empty, and will seek the warmth and love they lack in other places—sometimes in pre-marital relationships, or other risky or inappropriate activities. It is hard to change family dynamics once they are established, and even harder to reverse the emotional effects of childhood neglect. This is why our second priority is to focus on pitching our tent.

#### Dig a Well

Finally, after we have fulfilled our duties towards God and our family, we need to dig our well. As mentioned above, if we have the grace and blessings of God, then one well—one job—is enough. This is why it is the least important of the three tasks. When we have the grace of God, we will undoubtedly be able to find a good job that can sustain our family. Isaac, having this faith, gave away the first two wells he dug, and,

#### CONCLUSION

So, what is the secret to being fruitful in our lives? Is it simply a combination of hard work and good luck? Isaac’s story tells us that the first and foremost thing is to have God abiding with us and blessing us. With God by our side, no matter how hard our work is, or how great the pressure, we will be able to bear the burden. If we lose sight of God and His blessings, when challenges and competition appear at work, we will find it hard to cope. But if we have the blessing of God, we will not worry if we lose the first well, or even the second well, because we know that God has a third well prepared for us.

Isaac’s faith shone through his actions—he put God’s will above his own judgment when making decisions, responded positively to God’s blessings, and believed that God’s grace would be sufficient for his needs. He ensured his life was balanced by having the correct priorities—God first, family second, and livelihood third. If we emulate Isaac’s faith and actions, then we can also live a fruitful and blessed life in the land God has given us. ★

# Hard Hearts

Based on a sermon by Jachin—Singapore



Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:  
 “Today, if you will hear His voice,  
 Do not harden your hearts as in the  
 rebellion,  
 In the day of trial in the wilderness,  
 Where your fathers tested Me, tried  
 Me,  
 And saw My works forty years.  
 Therefore I was angry with that  
 generation,  
 And said, ‘They always go astray in  
 their heart,  
 And they have not known My ways.’  
 So I swore in My wrath,  
 ‘They shall not enter My rest.’ ”  
 (Heb 3:7–11)

The early Jewish Christians would have found this passage, borrowed from the Psalms by the author of Hebrews, very familiar. Faced with the wave of anti-Christian persecution that swept the Roman Empire, these Jewish converts might have yearned for the comfort and stability their old religion, Judaism, had afforded them. Their decision to remain faithful to Jesus required a lot of spiritual grit.

It is against this backdrop of persecution and pressure to forget Jesus that the author of Hebrews penned his epistle. Instead of relaying

“How can we identify a hardened heart? A striking symptom of this spiritual disease is the vile practice of complaining—the favorite habit of a group of people Jude would later call “grumblers.”

clichéd consolations, he chose to remind the early Christians of the ancient Israelites who were once like them—persecuted, confused, and never lacking in enemies. And just as He was with the Israelites, the almighty one true God was on their side. Yet these Israelites mostly perished in the wilderness. The author warned his audience not to be like them. In fact, the Israelites were a privileged group: they heard the very voice of God, and saw His mighty works. They were also taught the laws of God. But sadly, they rebelled against Him. The author of Hebrews diagnosed the primary cause of their downfall: hardened hearts. When one’s heart is hardened, one is not able to respond appropriately to what God has done.

Hence, the hardening of one’s heart is a pitfall that every Christian must guard against. It happened to the Israelites during the wilderness

journey. It happened to the Jewish Christians at the time of the writing of the Book of Hebrews. It could also happen to us today.

## MURMURING MEN

How can we identify a hardened heart? A striking symptom of this spiritual disease is the vile practice of complaining—the favorite habit of a group of people Jude would later call “grumblers.” The Israelites were a querulous people. Beginning with their first complaint, recorded in Numbers 11, it is clear that the Israelites expressed little else during their wanderings apart from their dissatisfaction about how God was leading them.

We do not know the reasons for the Israelites’ first complaint (Num 11:1–3). They were probably tired and frustrated with their journey in the wilderness, as well as the harsh living conditions. Moses, when



recalling those forty long years as a nomad, remarked poignantly that the wilderness was a “great and terrible place” (Deut 8:15). Their trek, which lasted almost half a century, was no fun, to say the least; travelling defenseless (or so they thought) amidst foreign and hostile kingdoms did not make things easier. They would endure all this to fight, quite possibly to the death, for a strange land to call their own. The odds were stacked against these former slaves, led by a shepherd wielding a wooden rod. Why did they complain? Well, it seems like they had every right to. Why, then, was God so displeased with them?

Apostle Paul tells us that we should not harden our hearts “as in the rebellion” (Heb 3:8). If we are always complaining about our life, we are complaining against God and what He has given us. This was the reason why God was displeased with

“A single grumble can drown out praises of thanksgiving; a small shadow of negativity can blind us to the light of grace that always shines our way.

the Israelites (Num 11). When they complained, they were not making harmless complaints about the scorching sun. They complained that God had allowed them to suffer in the wilderness. This was the first sign of a heart hardening against God’s love. Their complaints angered God, and He sent fire to burn them; hence, they named the place Taberah (which means “burning.”) They complained and they were burned.

A lesson for us Christians is that we have so much more at stake than the non-believer when we complain. The non-believer trusts only in himself and his ability to shape his own path, and therefore all his complaints amount to nothing more than emotional venting or self-critique. We Christians, on the other hand, trust that God has a plan for us and that His love and grace are constantly guiding us. This guidance helps us to become stronger

and better, despite, and sometimes because of, what we have to fight our way through. When the Christian complains, he does not just deny the grace given him, he could be denying God!

### CONTAGION

There are countless instances of the Israelites complaining. The second example of their rancorous nature, recorded straight after the first, shows us the grave infectiousness of complaining (Num 11:4–6).

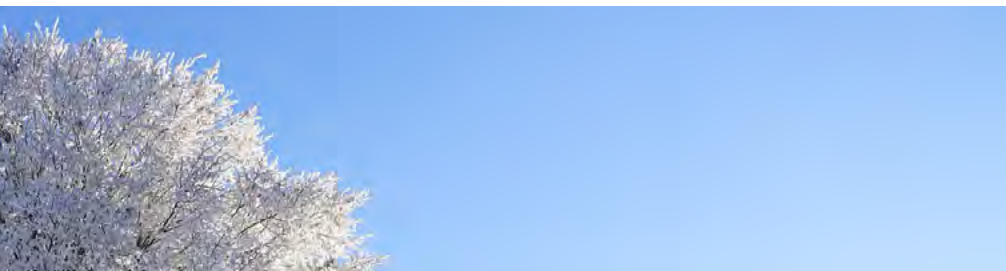
Not long after the embers from

God’s punishing fire had died, the non-Israelites who were with the group—the “mixed multitudes”—began to yearn for the luxuries of Egypt. They had no complaint about the sweltering heat or the dry and inhospitable land. But these Gentiles bemoaned the lack of variety in the food that was being sent to them directly from heaven. The Israelites, hearing the rising voices of dissatisfaction from within their ranks, also joined in the outrage over the manna that had for so long satisfied them. In melodramatic fashion, the children of Israel wept bitterly, beating their breasts as they once again insulted their God and the boundless grace that had bought them their liberty and lives—for the sake of fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onion and garlic (Num 11:5). The entire nation of Israel was affected by the complaints started by a small group of people.

With God guiding them on their wilderness journey, the Israelites had much to rejoice about and little to whine over. Admittedly, the wilderness was great and terrible; the desert can be scorching in the day, and freezing at night. However, God specially cared for them. He provided them with a pillar of cloud by day, to shield them from the full heat of the sun. At night, He provided them with the pillar of fire, to provide warmth. Ironically, they could see the pillar of cloud and fire every day. But they did not see the grace of God which was right before their eyes.

If we examine our own lives honestly, we know in our heart of hearts that we, too, have much to rejoice about and little to whine over. The trouble is that we are envious creatures, obsessed with comparing ourselves to others. To make things worse, many of us enjoy sharing our troubles with others—not as part of an effort to solve them or to find consolation, but to have others affirm our grievances and support their legitimacy with choruses of approval. This is an unhealthy habit that, while superficially harmless, can slowly make us forget God’s grace in our lives. A single grumble can drown out praises of thanksgiving; a small shadow of negativity can blind us to the light of grace that always shines our way. It is for this reason that Paul instructs:

*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. (Phil 4:8)*



### A LITTLE THING

But how exactly are we to follow Paul's exhortation? Keeping our heads and hearts sanctified seems to be a tall order for the modern Christian, so plugged into the world and all that it has to offer, both good and bad. If complaining is a bad habit, then we would need to adopt good habits to overcome its insidious nature. One effective habit would be to take a short moment every day, in the calm of the morning or the lull of the evening, to remember one good thing that has happened recently or a blessing in your life that has gone unappreciated for a while. This habit is as timeless as the instructive hymn *Count Your Blessings* because it is an exceedingly simple thing to do, yet so powerful and life-altering. The goal of a grateful faith, and the antidote to complaining, is not to invent great and fantastical events to be attributed to

belong to people who no longer truly believe in God's grace and will for their lives, simply because they do not wish to believe.

What could have persuaded the ancient Hebrews that God was truly on their side? That the Red Sea was parted by a prayer was not enough. That pillars of cloud and fire guarded their sleep and steered their steps was not enough. That manna from the heavens delivered itself at their feet was not enough. Miracle after miracle, grace upon grace—yet nothing could quell the rebellion that insisted on remaining in their hearts. Maybe miracles are too fleeting. Perhaps that is the funny thing about great and powerful interventions from God: they make for edifying testimonies and awe-inspiring anecdotes, but in the hustle-and-bustle of our daily struggles, they are easily put aside and forgotten.

“The goal of a grateful faith, and the antidote to complaining, is not to invent great and fantastical events to be attributed to Providence, but to find the miraculous in the mundane, and to be thankful for it.

Providence, but to find the miraculous in the mundane, and to be thankful for it.

### WANDERING HEARTS

We have seen the way a hard heart murmurs, and we have seen how quickly and mercilessly complaints can spread. As we follow the Israelites' journey to Canaan, we see the consequences of a hard heart.

Hard hearts are lost hearts. This is the terse and tragic lesson that the Israelite story teaches. Hard hearts

Even so, God had also demonstrated His unfailing love for them in the small things. From chapters 1 to 10 of Numbers, we read of the Creator preparing everything for the Israelites, including the most specific minutiae regarding their assembly, their leadership and their rituals. Everything was planned for them, down to the last detail.

Still, God's actions could not move the Israelites to true thanksgiving. Instead, they yielded to their “intense craving” (Num 11:4) and protested

God's directions. They rejected God's rule because, from their perspective, all that there was in the wilderness was suffering. But, in fact, God's intention was to humble and test them, to do them good in the end (Deut 8:16).

### A THAW WE MUST WORK FOR

How are we to thaw a heart long hardened? Or, for that matter, how are we to guard against hardening in the first place? What is most obvious in the Israelites' gradual decline is that they developed a habit of giving in to their temptations. Their sin was never that they longed for better things; it is only natural for man to feel discontent from time to time. What began as mere longing quickly became resentment and, finally, remonstrations of anger as they directed blame at their Redeemer—a deterioration made possible only because they loved their temptations more than they loved God.

Christianity does not call for a radically ascetic or monastic way of life. Yet, to be able to stand righteous and pure before God we have to struggle with the temptations we will invariably meet, and the best way to kill temptation is to starve it. Practically speaking, this means that every time we find ourselves in a compromising situation that threatens our spiritual integrity, which will burden our conscience and distress the Holy Spirit within us, we have to emphatically start with defiance. To defy temptation, and not enter into it, is the first critical step. We must pray for the strength to resist (Mt 6:13; 26:41). Secondly, it is important that we run away from our lusts, and avoid any situation where we could be tempted (2 Tim 2:22)—for example, choosing not to attend a party where we know drinking, dancing, and sinful activities will take place.

Once we have taken these steps, it is easier to make a stand for God and finally relegate past temptations to a distant memory, replaced by a disciplined commitment to our Christian values.

“The corporation, the student, and the banker know only the contentment that the world teaches them; they learn that to be content is to have all their needs and desires satiated. The Christian must learn differently: being content is ultimately not about satisfying ourselves, it is about satisfying God.

what Jesus meant when He said: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Mt 6:33). The corporation, the student, and the banker know only the contentment that the world teaches them; they learn that to be content is to have all their needs and desires satiated. The Christian must learn differently: being content is ultimately not about satisfying ourselves, it is about satisfying God. This is a demanding call. It is also a most necessary one. For the only honest reply the assured Christian can give to the question above— “What do I really need?”— is “God.” ★

CONCLUSION

“What do I really need?”

There are no easy answers. At the peak of our success, we may jubilantly give thanks for all of God’s blessings, feeling so fulfilled that we cannot

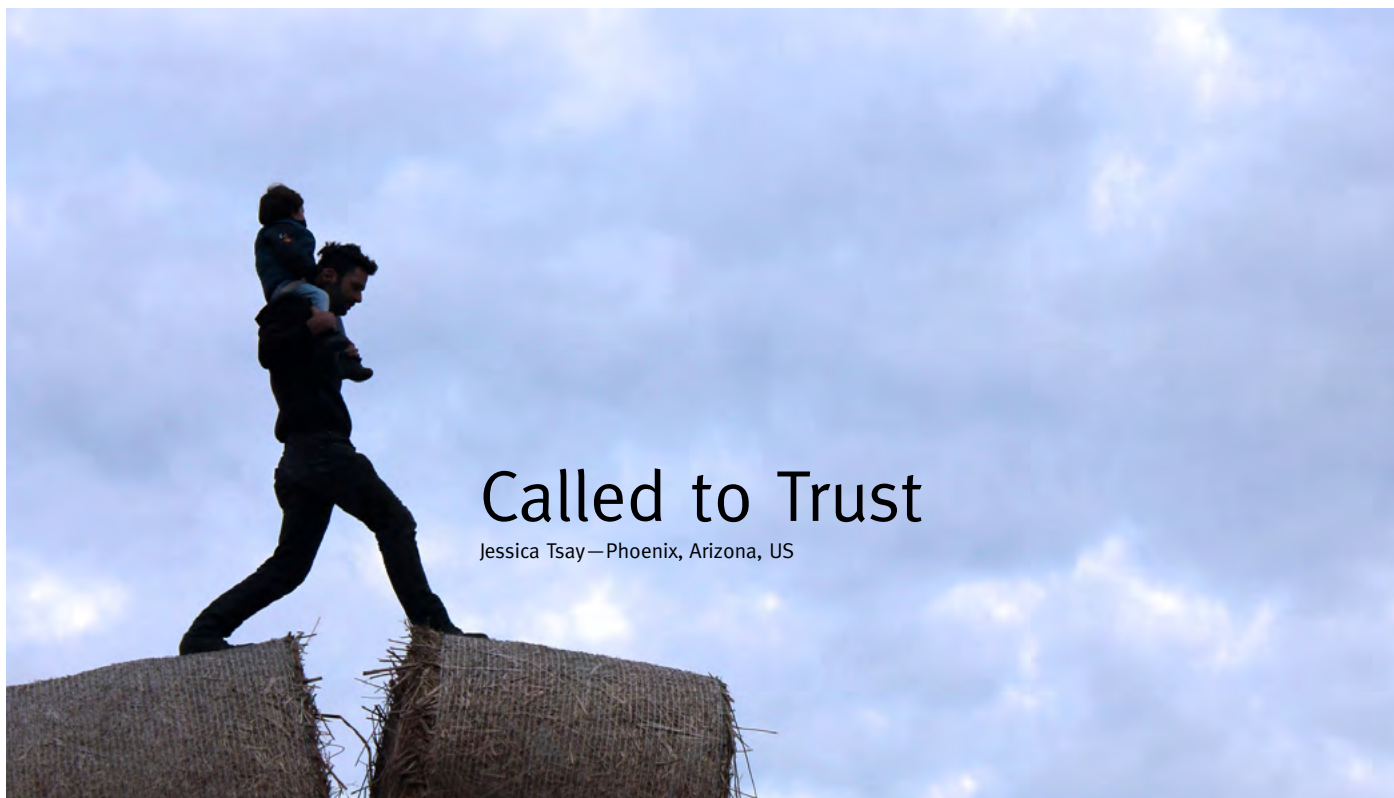
conceive of ever having been in want or in need of anything. Yet these are fleeting moments that never quite last long enough for us to understand what true contentment is. In a world of unending hyper-consumerism that rewards the greedy so richly, it is difficult for a Christian to grasp

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## Called to Trust

Jessica Tsay—Phoenix, Arizona, US

There may be times when we face situations in which we are unable to see what lies ahead. When the situation is out of our control, we are fearful of facing the unknown.

When God called Elijah into hiding, into a new life, Elijah was brought face to face with an unknown future (1 Kgs 17:1–7). Through his calling, Elijah learned to renew his trust in God daily. Likewise, if we are able to look to God—trusting Him in every moment—we will find that those who trust in God will truly not lack anything.

### SUBMITTING TO GOD’S WILL

*“Get away from here and turn eastward, and **hide** by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan.” (1 Kgs 17:3, emphasis added)*

When God called Elijah, His first command was to “get away” and “hide.” With no idea of why he needed to hide or how long he would be there, Elijah was forced to make a decision: *Should I obey?* It is likely Elijah had questions, but instead of voicing them, he chose to obey God.

Without any hesitation, Elijah *went and did* what God had commanded him. It is notable that during his interaction with God, Elijah is not recorded to have said anything, not even a word! But his actions speak for him—in complete submission and trust in God’s word, he swiftly heeded God’s instructions and hid himself by the Brook Cherith.

The same unquestioning obedience can be seen when Abram was called. In Genesis 12:1, God told him to “get out” of his country. Immediately following these instructions, the Bible records that Abram “departed as the LORD had spoken to him” (Gen 12:4). Without asking why or voicing any complaints, Abram willingly left his home to go to an unfamiliar place. When God calls, are we likewise willing to trust and obey Him?

Both of these characters showed exemplary obedience to God’s will. If we are able to trust in God and in His

instructions, we too will find that God has not led us thus far only to leave us to fend for ourselves. When God calls, He only asks that we take the first step. If we do so in submission and trust, we will lack nothing. After heeding the Lord’s command, Elijah did not find himself struggling alone; he instead found God’s hand supplying all his needs. No matter what unknown steps we face in our own lives, let us learn to submit to God’s instructions, trusting that we will not lack anything if we obey.

### OPENING OUR MINDS TO THE WAY GOD PROVIDES

*“And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have **commanded the ravens to feed you there.**” (1 Kgs 17:4, emphasis added)*

While obtaining water from a brook seems reasonable, it is peculiar that

*”In being fed by God, Elijah was being sustained—filled with spiritual strength to endure his time by the brook, as well as the low points that he would encounter throughout the rest of his life.*

“When we are put into situations in which we do not know the will of God or are unable to hear Him, are we able to patiently wait on the Lord? It is in times like these that we must continue to wait. It is not our place to walk ahead of God, but to follow closely behind Him.

the Lord commanded ravens to feed Elijah. It must have seemed very impractical and surprising to Elijah when he heard that ravens would feed him. Surely there are easier ways to provide food! However, this is the mystery of God’s providence.

God’s use of ravens taught Elijah two things. First, God provides in His own ways and can use anything or anyone to do His work. God could have used any other bird to bring him food, or better yet, He could have chosen not to use an animal, but a human being. In the Levitical law, ravens are labelled “unclean,” an abomination (Lev 11:13, 15). Using a bird—an *unclean* bird—serves as a striking message that God can use what we deem unworthy to fulfill His will. We often forget that the way in which God provides may be unexpected, or unfamiliar. Even if it appears irrational to us, we must be aware and accepting of the ways in which God provides.

Second, God wanted Elijah to keep his eyes on Him. Elijah had no control over the comings and goings of the ravens. At the start of each day, he was forced to gaze at the sky and wonder, *Will the ravens still come today?* This compelled him to constantly renew his trust in the Lord. Each day, Elijah would need to once again trust that the ravens would come and that, through them, God would provide.

Elijah’s continual trust in the Lord’s providence did not fail him. Every day, his physical necessities were fulfilled and he never found himself lacking.

In addition to being fed physically, God also fed him spiritually. In the Bible, the word “feed” is used not only in instances of physical feeding, but also in being emotionally or spiritually sustained. Psalm 55:22 says that if we cast our burdens on the Lord, He will sustain us. The Hebrew word for “sustain” is the same word

used when God commanded the ravens to *feed* Elijah. In being fed by God, Elijah was being sustained—filled with spiritual strength to endure his time by the brook, as well as the low points that he would encounter throughout the rest of his life.

Let us learn from Elijah and work daily to renew our trust in the Lord. Let us keep ourselves open to the ways He provides, because when God provides, we will lack nothing.

### WAITING ON THE LORD

*So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, for he **went and stayed** by the Brook Cherith, which flows into the Jordan. (1 Kgs 17:5)*

After Elijah obeyed the Lord’s will and trusted in His unexpected form of providence, he faced another problem. Day by day, Elijah watched as the water in the brook dwindled, until it eventually dried up. And during this time, God was silent. This was most likely a prolonged period of silence, as only “after a while” did the brook dry up (1 Kgs 17:7).

For many of us, the painfully gradual process of watching the water decline would undoubtedly cause increasing anxiety. Perhaps we would cry out and complain to God. We might wonder if we should take the situation into our own hands and try to find another water source. With our life at stake, we would most likely conclude that leaving would be our best option in order to preserve our life.

But Elijah did none of these things. Elijah’s voice is not recorded during this period of time, but again he speaks through his actions. Not only did he go and do according to the Lord’s will, but he also *stayed* there. He stayed even though he was unsure

of what to do, even with the receding water level of the brook. He stayed even though God was silent. He chose to stay in spite of everything. He did not accusingly ask, “God, where are You?” Instead, his actions humbly whispered, “God, I will wait for You.”

When we are put into situations in which we do not know the will of God or are unable to hear Him, are we able to patiently wait on the Lord? It is in times like these that we must continue to wait. It is not our place to walk ahead of God, but to follow closely *behind* Him. He wants us to follow Him in the same way that the Israelites followed the pillar of cloud in the wilderness. Where the pillar went, they followed; and where the pillar stopped, there they also stopped. If we do not walk ahead, God will prepare the way for us so that we will not lack anything. Elijah was able to wait on God throughout His silence, and was thus provided for, through the widow at Zarephath after the brook dried up. Even if we do not understand God’s will, it is in patience that we must wait for the Lord, knowing that He will provide in His own time.

### CONCLUSION

Elijah’s actions in response to God’s command vividly demonstrated his unwavering trust in God. When we are able to trust God in the same way Elijah did, we can boldly face the unknown. We can be reassured that God will provide in His own way and in His own time, that He goes before us and is with us every step of the way. In every need, we trust that He will supply.

*The LORD is my shepherd;  
I shall not want. (Ps 23:1) ★*



## Naomi's Return

Annica Liu—Vancouver, Canada

Within ten short years of Naomi and her family leaving Bethlehem for the land of Moab, three key members of her household had passed away—her husband, and both of her sons. Naomi was left desolate, in a foreign land with no financial support. Her future was bleak. The depth of sorrow in Naomi's heart was reflected in her lament: "I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty" (Ruth 1:21a).

While the Book of Ruth describes this tragic tale, it also conveys a wondrous story of return and restoration. From Naomi's return to the promised land, we learn how turning back to the Lord can bring us both physical and spiritual restoration.

### WHERE HAVE WE TURNED?

When a famine fell on Judah, Naomi and her family decided to do what seemed most rational under the circumstances—leave Bethlehem and find food elsewhere. But instead of finding themselves better off, this move signaled the beginning of their woes.

Today, we may not have physically turned away from God or left His church, but our hearts may have

*Today, we may not have physically turned away from God or left His church, but our hearts may have departed from Him. At life's crossroads or in difficult situations, we may make similar choices as Naomi and her family.*

departed from Him. At life's crossroads or in difficult situations, we may make similar choices as Naomi and her family. When we find ourselves in need, it is difficult to reject an imminent solution to the challenges surrounding us.

Rather than turning to God and trusting in the promises of His care, we turn to what is most logical and readily available: the might and promises of men. Similar to how the Israelites relied on the chariots and armies of Egypt in their battles against other nations (Isa 31:1–3), we may rely on other, more practical, methods to solve our needs.

However, at this time, we must extend our eyesight to the spiritual realm and consider God's will and purpose for us. We must turn our hearts to fully rely on God, and wait for His timing. In choosing to remain steadfast in our hope in God, we

give ourselves the opportunity to experience the full extent of His might and power.

### AN URGE TO RETURN

The sorrow-filled years away from God took their toll on Naomi. At a certain point, she realized that Moab was no longer the place she wanted to be in. She had travelled to the land of Moab with hope, yet the land had emptied her hands of all that she had. What could she possibly do, now that all her hope and security were gone?

When Naomi heard that God had visited His people and given them food again, she felt an urge to return. But she could have also struggled with discouraging thoughts: *I have to make the journey back by myself; it's not safe. What will people think or say about me? They will ridicule me! Is there anywhere else I can go? What if I just stayed behind?*



“We must turn our hearts to fully rely on God, and wait for His timing. In choosing to remain steadfast in our hope in God, we give ourselves the opportunity to experience the full extent of His might and power.

For those of us who are considering turning our hearts and footsteps back to God, these very same doubts and concerns may intimidate us. But we must consider further: Are we currently in a place where we want to remain? Or do we feel empty, tormented, and deprived of joy in our souls? Do we truly want to wait until we reach rock bottom, and have no other choice, before we are willing to return to God?

As Jesus said in John 15:5, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; *for without Me you can do nothing*” (emphasis added). Regardless of how or why we may have turned away from God, returning to Him is the only way we can find true satisfaction, fulfillment, and restoration of life.

It may seem easier to remain in our current state, or find other ways out, but these are only temporary fixes to our problems. Just as Naomi had to leave her life in Moab behind and bravely face her fears, so do we. Things will only deteriorate if we do not make that change, and the longer we delay, the more harm we will do to ourselves.

### THE RESTORATION

It took courage and resolve for Naomi to return home. In fact, upon her return, some of her fears came true as word spread throughout the entire city (Ruth 1:19). However, that soon passed.

What was greater and more enduring was God’s guiding hand, apparent throughout the remaining chapters of Ruth. God not only provided for Naomi’s physical needs by leading her daughter-in-law to the right person, place, and time (Ruth 2:3–4), but more importantly, He restored their family’s lineage through the son whom Ruth bore (4:10,15).

Today, what does this restoration mean to us? It means returning to a state of life; a state of joy; a state of strength—*being able to do all things through Christ who strengthens us* (Phil 4:13). Even if famine surrounds us, God will not forsake us. Even if we suffer hunger for a while, He will provide a way. But without God, the source of all good things, we will inevitably reach a state of emptiness. Therefore, let us turn our hearts towards Him and continue steadfastly in the hope of His salvation.

As for Naomi, she had gone out from the Lord full and returned home empty. Yet upon her return, the Lord blessed her with the fullness of joy and gladness. In addition, as she held her grandson to her bosom, next to her heart (Ruth 4:16), Naomi finally understood: the good Lord had truly restored her.

*You have turned for me my  
mourning into dancing;  
You have put off my sackcloth and  
clothed me with gladness.*

(Ps 30:11) ★



# A Letter to Our Youths: Thoughts on Career and Marriage

Shun Tao Hsieh—Taichung, Taiwan

*Peace to our youths-in-Christ!*

May the Lord Jesus Christ bestow grace upon you, and make your future glorious to God. I imagine your parents and friends wish this same blessing for you. The question is: what can you do to secure this blessing? I would like to share some thoughts on two matters: your career and your marriage.

## STEPS TO CAREER SUCCESS— THE CHRISTIAN WAY

After you graduate from academia, you will enter the world of work. In your place of employment, you will have superiors above you, thus making you a subordinate. Using the terminology of the Bible, they will be your “master,” and you, their “servant.” What they will require of you is faithfulness (1 Cor 4:2), as manifested in your submission in all things (1 Pet 2:18). You should strive to be a good employee, exhibiting qualities such as punctuality, conscientiousness, and responsibility.

In terms of punctuality, do not arrive late for work, or leave early; always make sure to complete your tasks within the target deadline.

“A great man is not necessarily one who accomplishes great things, but rather, someone who does his utmost, even when performing a small deed.”

In terms of conscientiousness, be passionate about your job; refrain from idle chatter within office hours; and always look for other tasks to do after you have completed your own work. In terms of responsibility, do all things with your heart and mind, and be faithful in small matters as well as in the great (Lk 16:10).

### Be Faithful in the Small Things

In the late-16th century, there was a famous Japanese military strategist by the name of Hideyoshi Toyotomi (1536–1598). During his adolescent years, he was a sandal-bearer to Nobunaga Oda, a powerful feudal lord. Hideyoshi's daily duties included bringing straw sandals to his master when his master got out of bed. In winter, he would place the sandals against his chest to warm them before giving them to his master; he resolved to be the best sandal bearer in Japan. One day, his master asked him, “Why are the sandals warm?” Hideyoshi

replied respectfully and truthfully. His faithfulness touched his master, who predicted that he would become someone great one day. Indeed, discerning eyes can tell greatness from mediocrity. Later, when Nobunaga was killed by a subordinate, Hideyoshi used his military strategy skills to lead an army to quell the unrest and avenge his master. He soon became a dominant figure in Japan.

Fetching sandals is undoubtedly a lowly job; yet, from the way a person performs this task, we can see his true spirit. A great man is not necessarily one who accomplishes great things, but rather, someone who does his utmost, even when performing a small deed.

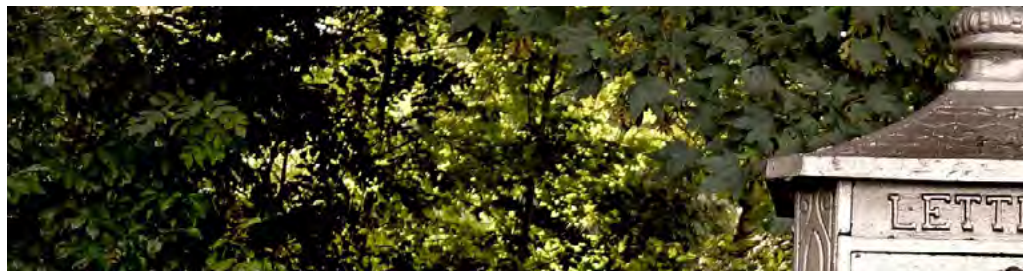
In the society that we now live in, efficiency is key. No matter what you do, you need to do it more accurately, seamlessly and speedily than ever before. You need to be observant and notice problems that others overlook. You must also learn to reflect, to



anticipate problems that others do not think of. Only in this way can you be creative, and only with creativity can there be innovation. Innovation will give you the competitive edge to survive in your industry.

### Serving God is Integral to Our Success

It is also good to acquire more knowledge and keep ourselves relevant through extensive reading. We also need wisdom which comes from fearing God: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov 9:10). There are a number of ways to show we fear God: attend worship services and fellowships; study the Bible conscientiously and abide by God's will; and pray earnestly to maintain a close relationship with God. Take



of peace" (Eph 6:15), as it grants peace to all who believe (Mt 4:23–24; 11:28–29). It is also the "gospel of reconciliation" (Eph 2:17), as it reconciles man with God, and man with man (Eph 2:12–16). It is the "gospel of salvation," as all who believe will receive the Holy Spirit of promise, which is the guarantee of our heavenly inheritance (Eph 1:13–14).

Because the gospel is so precious, the Bible says, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel

been known to ask, "Why can't I marry an unbeliever if I bring him and his family to the Lord?"

My answer is, "You would be fortunate to hold on to your own faith, let alone bring your spouse and his or her family to believe. Do you think it would be an easy task to bring the entire family to God? Please do not neglect that it is the Lord who chooses whom He wishes to save (Jn 6:37, 44, 65; 15:16). If the family is not moved by God, can you really bring them to Him and override the sovereignty of the Lord (Eph 1:4–5; 2 Tim 1:9)? What if they really don't want to believe?"

I know of a sister from Taiwan who married a non-believer. On the wedding day, the newly-weds were made to stand before the family idols and ancestral tablets. The mother-in-law gave the bride incense with which to pay her respects, at which point the bride said, "I believe in Jesus; I cannot worship idols."

The mother-in-law was livid and scolded her son for his choice of bride. Eventually, the bridegroom sent the bride back to her own home, and did not dare to bring her back to his house. She cried until her tears ran dry, but it was too late!

### The Danger of Being Yoked to an Unbeliever

Some brothers claim there is less risk of them having to compromise their faith should they marry a non-believer. My answer is, "For every brother who marries a non-believer, will there not be a sister with one less brother to marry? And might it not cause her to look for a spouse outside of the church?"

Moses told the Israelites, "Nor shall you make marriages with them [the

*Because the gospel is so precious, the Bible says, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom 10:15b). Hesitate no longer, equip yourself to become part of this beautiful team!*

time to participate in church work, take part in the grace of prospering the gospel. Offer tithes on time, and God shall bless you (Mal 3:10). If you do these things, success will surely be yours. In addition, God shall receive His due glory!

Should you feel a sense of commission, or are moved by the Holy Spirit to offer yourself to God as a full-time minister, then enroll in the theological training program. This would be the best choice at this juncture of your life! The last day is fast approaching; indeed, it is at our very doorstep (Mt 24:3–33; 2 Tim 3:1–4), and the speed at which we must preach the gospel is accelerating (Rev 14:6–7). The church requires more youths to offer themselves to participate in the work of spreading the gospel throughout the world. The message we preach is the "gospel

of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom 10:15b). Hesitate no longer, equip yourself to become part of this beautiful team!

### THE BLESSING OF MARRYING IN THE LORD

#### Your Marriage Shapes Your Faith

All of you are now adults, eligible to consider marriage. As we know, marriage is a very important part of one's life. A successful marriage will have positive effects on how your family is established, how you manage your career, and on the course of your faith, etc. In contrast, a wrong decision can lead to endless troubles.

Youths will have heard countless times the teaching about the importance of marrying in the Lord. This often leads to different reactions. Some may feel frustrated, and have





Gentiles]. You shall not give your daughter to their son, nor take their daughter for your son. For they will turn your sons away from following Me, to serve other gods; so the anger of the LORD will be aroused against you and destroy you suddenly" (Deut 7:3–4). These words describe the outcome of marrying non-believers: corruption of the faith, turning away to idols, and ultimately being forsaken by the true God.

Learn from the examples in the Bible. After Solomon built the temple and his palace, he took for himself one thousand Gentile concubines. In his old age, they led him to worship idols and to do things which were abominable in the eyes of God. God was angered and said that He would take Solomon's kingdom, apart from one tribe, from his son and give it to his servant (1 Kgs 11:1–13).

When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls, he saw that the Jews took Gentile wives, and their children were unable to speak the language of Judah. Nehemiah rebuked them, saying, "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin. Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?" (Neh 13:26–27).

Because the Jews intermarried with Gentiles, their children could not speak the language of Judah. In a spiritual sense, those who marry unbelievers today will cause their children to lose the ability to "speak the language of Judah." In other words, the environment they will

grow up in will lack the spiritual and religious dimension. In short, the faith of the next generation will be a cause of worry if our youths marry non-believers.

During the 1960s, the Taiwan General Assembly sent me to minister the church at Taipei. One day, a church committee member took me to visit a sister. When we knelt down to pray, her two children began giggling and continued doing so until the prayer ended. It was as if they were experiencing something unfamiliar. After we left her house, I told the committee member, "I can see that the sister has never prayed at home before, or brought her two children to attend religious education classes in church."

He asked, "How do you know?"

I said, "If she had, they would not have behaved in that way."

The sister was initially from the church in Taichung, and her family was among the early believers in the central region. As a youth, she had a strong faith. It was only after she married a non-believer that her faith declined—to such an extent that she did not pray with her children.

Indeed, we see some youths who once had strong faith and were even religious education teachers. But after marrying non-believers, their faith deteriorated with time, and you now rarely see them attending church

services. Consider this carefully: on average, it takes the church twenty years to cultivate a person's faith, starting from kindergarten class to youth class. With the amount of time, effort and resources being invested in each member, surely the hope is that they would be able to take up some church work when they grow up. However, because they marry a non-believer and backslide in their faith, the investment of the church comes to nothing. This is indeed a great loss—it is heartbreaking!

Believers and unbelievers cannot be yoked together; what fellowship or communion can they have (2 Cor 6:14)? If you believe in the Lord and strive for the everlasting blessing, while your spouse does not believe and pursues the things of the world, how can you reconcile the disparity? How can you achieve intimacy or harmony?

#### Have an Open Mind

Why do some members find it hard to find their ideal spouse in church, or feel the need to look outside? This is a complex question. Personally, I feel that one reason is that they have overly high expectations and too many conditions.

The Greek philosopher Plato once had a student who sought his advice with regards to choosing a spouse. Plato instructed him, saying, "Go into the wheat field and bring me the largest grain you can find. Walk from this end to that end, but you can only go forwards, not backwards."

His student did accordingly, but no matter how he tried to choose, he could not find a suitable grain of wheat. It was only when he reached the end of the field that he remembered there was a nice plump

☞ *If you believe in the Lord and strive for the everlasting blessing, while your spouse does not believe and pursues the things of the world, how can you reconcile the disparity? How can you achieve intimacy or harmony?*

## EXHORTATION

specimen some way back. However, because he had been told he could not walk backwards, he had no choice but to pluck a grain from the end of the field.

This story tells us that time and tide wait for no man, and we are not able to turn back the clock. If we hold very high expectations with regards to our choice of spouse, we will always be dissatisfied no matter how hard we look. And then, when age catches up with us, we will have a limited choice, and, like Pluto's student, just pick anything we can find at the end of the field!

During the 1970s, I introduced a sister to a brother. After the initial meeting, I asked him about his impression of the sister. He blushed,

The moral is not to have too many conditions or high expectations when you choose a spouse. As long as the other party has a good character, a pure faith, and an acceptable appearance, that is sufficient.

May the Lord bless you to find someone who is best suited to you.

*Hallelujah, and peace be with you.  
Farewell!*

*Hsieh Shun Tao ★*

*“Time and tide wait for no man, and we are not able to turn back the clock. If we hold very high expectations with regards to our choice of spouse, we will always be dissatisfied no matter how hard we look.”*

silently looking down at the floor. I said, “If you are too shy to say what you think, let me suggest marks out of a hundred: one hundred marks for ‘I won’t find anyone better’; eighty marks for ‘ideal’; sixty marks for ‘acceptable!’”

At that point, he stammered, “My own circumstances are not that good; how can I have high expectations of someone else?”

I understood his remark and told him, “A blissful marriage does not depend on whether the other person fulfills certain conditions, but whether you both have the word of God in your hearts.”

Soon after, they were engaged, then married, and then they became parents. Today, they are grandparents, and remain a loving couple.



*Editor's note: The message from this column was based on a counselling lecture, addressed to teenagers (around ages 14 to 18) attending the short term students' theological training course in Singapore.*

### INTRODUCTION—A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE

During one's adolescence, friends play a very crucial role, and their value systems can influence us. None of us wants to be excluded from our peer group. Hence good habits are easily abandoned when we meet with people who pressure us to abandon our principles, to conform to their lifestyles and practices. While caving in to peer pressure may not always harm us, there are areas where it is absolutely necessary for us to maintain an uncompromising stand and even go against the norms of our peers.

During my teenage years, I had a friend who kept bugging me, "Why can't you skip church just once?" I thought very hard about how to answer him; I could not use the Bible because he did not even believe in the Bible. But he finally stopped when I told him that it was my principle. One day, I asked him why he had stopped questioning me. He replied, "Because it's your principle. Principles must be upheld."

### LESSONS FROM NOAH

A clear biblical example of one who stood against the tide and held firmly to his principles is Noah. In his time, "the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose" (Gen 6:2). The sons of God abandoned the principle of marrying in the Lord; they decided to choose wives according to their own ideals, regardless of faith. Imagine living in a world where all your peers—siblings and friends in church—married non-believers. Could you still uphold your principle? Very probably, we would soon conform to popular belief and think that marriage to someone with a different faith is acceptable. Unlike his peers, Noah stood his ground. This must mean

that he had married a daughter of God. This is why the Bible describes him as a man who found grace in the eyes of God (Gen 6:8–9).

*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. (Mt 24:38)*

This verse may puzzle us—what is wrong with eating, drinking, and marrying? After all, Noah and his sons also ate, drank, and got married. There is nothing wrong with these activities. However, what was wrong with the people of the world was that they did all of these excessively and exclusive of God; God was not important anymore. When God is no longer our

”Life is about making hard decisions. If our friends manage to persuade us to make a decision contrary to our faith by saying it will be “just once,” our foundation weakens.





focal point, whatever we do can be a sin, even activities as neutral as eating, drinking and marrying. When we lose sight of God in our life, everyday actions can become distractions that weaken our faith.

Noah was the head of his household. Had he decided to be like the rest of his society, his family would have also ended up like them too. But Noah was different. His persistent determination to walk with God saved his entire household. Our actions impact those around us; we should also follow the path that Noah chose.

### OUR LIFE CHOICES

As children and teenagers, our decision and actions are often guided by fear of parental reprimand. But what happens when we outgrow our fear of parental rebuke? Would we gradually conform to the behavior of our peers? Consider these examples:

- *If your friends asked you to forego Sabbath for a day out with them, what would you do?*
- *If all your classmates were cheating in a test, what would you do?*
- *If your boss asked you to help plan the Christmas party for the company, what would you do? (If you don't make your stand, he will repeat his request every year.)*
- *If your boss asked for volunteers to work on the Sabbath day, what would you do? (If you do not volunteer, he will probably overlook you for promotion.)*
- *If there were no suitable marriage prospects for you in church, what would you do?*

Life is about making hard decisions. If our friends manage to persuade us to make a decision contrary to our faith by saying it will be "just once,"



our foundation weakens. After that first compromise, we are likely to make a second, a third, and perhaps even more. Standing our ground comes with a price. Noah probably lost many friends. Everyone was eating and drinking, but Noah was the only one who chose to worship God. Noah was the only one who decided he was going to walk with God his entire life.

Besides our peers, time is another form of pressure testing our determination to uphold God's principles. For example, we may be able to cling tightly to the principle of marriage in the Lord when youth is on our side. But if potential marriage partners in church have decided they are incompatible with you, and the man/woman of your dreams appears, outside of church, and pursues you passionately, what would you do? Some may choose to discard biblical principles because lifelong loneliness is too heavy a price. But it is really a matter of perspective. When we walk in God's way, we walk with Him. So in reality, we are never alone.

*But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD...Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God. (Gen 6:8-9)*

Noah found grace in God's eyes because he stood against the ungodly tide of his days. What are some of the ungodly currents that characterize our modern world?

### 1. PORNOGRAPHY

In the 21st century, pornography appears to be an increasingly acceptable part of life. The production and distribution of pornographic films are lawful in many countries,<sup>1</sup> and have been made more accessible via the Internet. The allure of pornography partly lies in its traditionally forbidden nature. The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil may not have been especially delicious compared to the others, but Eve was attracted to it—it was pleasing to her eyes—because she was not allowed to taste it. Similarly, many are attracted to pornography both by its content and the guilty thrill of accessing it.

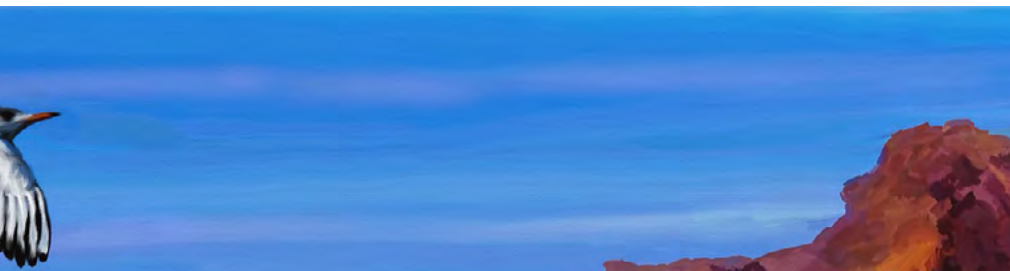
According to the Bible, accessing pornographic websites or reading pornographic material is a sin. Sex is good and should only be enjoyed within a marriage. Any sexual activity beyond the scope of marriage is a sin. Although people who watch pornography claim they are only passive viewers, the Bible teaches that if we look at a woman lustfully and fantasize, we have already committed adultery in our heart. Eve's desires were aroused by looking at the forbidden fruit, and eventually she succumbed to temptation. We must withstand the sinful pleasures offered by pornography.

Pornographic content or advertisements may pop up unsolicited on our computer or mobile screens. When we unintentionally view these, it is not a sin. However, if we make a deliberate decision to continue watching, then that becomes sin.

Do not take this sin lightly and dismiss it just because "everyone is doing it." Even if we dabble in

<sup>1</sup> Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pornography\\_by\\_region](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pornography_by_region)

*Any sexual activity beyond the scope of marriage is a sin. Although people who watch pornography claim they are only passive viewers, the Bible teaches that if we look at a woman lustfully and fantasize, we have already committed adultery in our heart.*



viewing pornography and experience no adverse effects, it does not mean that we can continue doing so without spiritual consequences. Understand what is at stake here—this is one of the hooks that Satan is using to try to reel you to his side.

### Recognize our addiction to pornography

Addiction means we cannot wean ourselves off something. If we find ourselves watching pornography on a daily, weekly or monthly basis, we have become addicted. If we do not feel that we are addicted to it, it may be because we do not think that it is morally wrong, or we brush it off as a naughty but harmless “habit,” or a trivial sin. All these attitudes are dangerous because they prolong our addiction.

Addicts are often trapped in a vicious circle of guilt and helplessness. For instance, we feel guilty indulging in our pornography habit. So we stop. But we miss the “kick” it gives us so

we go back to it, which makes us feel guilty all over again. We are miserable, but we cannot stop sinning—therein lies the devil's hold over us.

In the wilderness, God provided sustenance for Israel through manna. God did not give them meat because He was training them. But the Israelites and the mixed multitude had an intense craving for meat. Instead of overcoming this and being thankful to God for His providence, they yielded to their lusts, and cried for meat (Num 11:4–35). The final result was death because they incurred the Lord's anger (Num 11:33). Therefore, if we have an intense craving for pornography (or anything sinful), we must starve it! Yielding to these intense desires will most certainly lead to our spiritual death. Our friends may enjoy pornographic material, and even pass it around. But we must remember Noah—stand against the tide and reject these worldly trending practices.

### A Biblical Perspective on Pornography

The word “pornography” comes from the Greek word *pornea*. This is the word used in the Bible for sexual immorality. Watching pornography does not mean we have committed sexual immorality. But Jesus tells us that everything starts from the heart (Mt 5:28). Not guarding our hearts may lead us into the sin of watching pornography or, worse, sexual immorality. And all those who practise the works of the flesh—adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, and so on—cannot enter heaven (Gal 5:19–21). The sanctity of marriage must be preserved; sexual acts outside marriage are not permissible. Looking at the nakedness of another person (who is not married to you) is abominable in the sight of God (Hab 2:15).

### Do not be numb to sin!

Some believers—despite much admonition—continue to think there is nothing wrong with watching pornography. Such recalcitrant ignoring of God's word is an example of willful sinning. And when we sin willfully, there remains no sacrifice for sins (Heb 10:26)!

*For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. (Heb 4:2)*

The devil prowls and constantly seeks opportunities to devour God's children (1 Pet 5:8). The serpent spews a flood from his mouth, hoping to sweep away and drown believers (Rev 12:15). We must, thus, be ever watchful and anxious; overcome this sin of pornography and uphold His principles so that we do not fail God's exam of obedience.

### Resolve to stop!

Pornography addiction must be stopped. There is no such thing as “trying our best.” Just like people trying to quit smoking or drug abuse, we must go cold turkey, i.e., immediately break the vicious circle by resolving to stop from today. No man can serve two masters. We cannot enter the kingdom of heaven if we continue serving pornography. If we find that we do not have the strength, there are some general principles in the verse below that we can apply in our lives.

*Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2 Tim 2:22)*

#### 1. Flee youthful lusts: Run away.

Do not put ourselves in a situation where we are vulnerable. However, although we may have put distance between ourselves and the source of sin, if there is nothing to fill the emptiness that is in us, we will go back to the sin. So the next step is equally important.



## 2. Pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace: Run towards God.

Fill ourselves and our time with something positive. We would not be comfortable watching porn after we have prayed for half an hour or after reading the Bible. Our laziness to undertake consistent spiritual nurture is what endangers and kills us. We have to continually run away from sin and run towards God. We have to fill our lives with healthy and godly pursuits. Only God can fill that emptiness in us.

**3. With those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart: Run with people who are holy.** We may have the best of intentions and strongest resolve, but if we try to keep our resolution by ourselves, we are likely to fail. Spiritual companions can help to warn and keep us from returning to our sin.

### Take drastic defense measures

For those who are in the process of wading into this sin, you must immediately activate extreme measures to protect yourself. For instance, if you are watching pornography on your smartphones, replace this with one that can just call and send text messages. If you are watching porn on your personal laptops, give up the laptop or use it only in a public area.

*But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.*

(Mt 5:28–30)

The Bible says that it is better to enter heaven with our hand chopped off than to lose our soul. If we are unwilling to give it up, we will not be able to stand against the



tide of our own desires. There is no way we can stop unless we put our minds to it. This habit of indulging in pornography will be much easier to overcome when we have someone whom we trust watching over us. If we do not feel comfortable telling the preachers or our parents, find friends who can keep tabs on us (and maybe vice versa). Being accountable forces us to be responsible.

*We maintain minimum contact because we do not want to give either our carnal desires or the devil an opportunity to work. We exercise maximum restraint because we have seen even ministers of the church fall prey to sexual sin.*

## 2. SEXUAL PURITY

In the world today, sexual relations are seen as part and parcel of dating. Sleeping with the person you are attracted to, sleeping with your serious crush, sleeping with different partners, etc.—these are deemed acceptable between consenting adults. But all these are unacceptable for the true Christian. Sexual relations outside marriage is a sin. Youths must stand against this tide and maintain their purity until they marry in the Lord.

The devil is a roaring lion patiently seeking his prey. At the smallest opportunity—when we display the slightest inclination to yield to lust and desire—the devil will pounce. He is the greatest and wiliest opportunist, so we have to be extra careful. Do not overestimate our ability to withstand temptation. Do not think yielding to sexual sin only happens to other people. Do not trust your boyfriend or girlfriend, do not even trust yourself.

### Adolescent dating

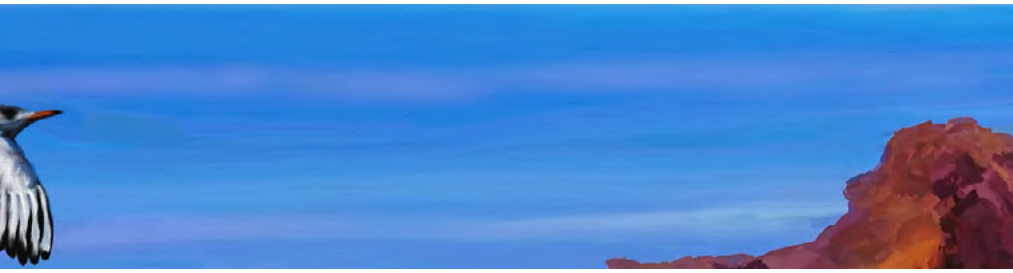
The sin of Noah's time was that they married whomever they liked. God destroyed them because of this sin! While this seems unnecessarily harsh in the eyes of modern liberals, God sees much farther than man. He knows the danger that the daughters of men can pose to the sons of God. If you are dating someone outside of church, cut it off as quickly as possible.

Non-believers who do not share our faith may not subscribe to the same moral values as ours. Because they are neither guided nor constrained by the word of God, they will do whatever seems right in their own eyes. Once you are emotionally attached to them, you are likely to compromise on the church's stand regarding sexual purity. In particular, adolescent romantic relationships tend to be emotionally intense and short-lived.<sup>2</sup> So teenagers who are in a relationship with non-believers must cut these off, lest they fall into a situation that they will regret for the rest of their lives.

Dating a church member in our teens is also inappropriate. If we do this, we will be susceptible to the same temptations that dating a non-believer brings. Hence, if we are not yet ready to be married, do not engage in activities—dating, pursuing girlfriend-boyfriend relationships—that provide ample opportunity to sin.

<sup>2</sup> Feiring, C. (1999). Other-sex friendship networks and the development of romantic relationships in adolescence. *Journal of Youth & Adolescence*, 28(4), 495–512.





### Sexual activities

Teenagers in church often like to ask what the definition of “sex” is. Perhaps the underlying question is “how far” they can go. The Bible does not say what sex constitutes, only that it is when “a man lies with a woman.” The church’s stand is that oral sex and mutual masturbation are also considered sex. If you have engaged in these, then you have no choice but to marry the party with whom you have indulged. Therein lies the danger. If the other person does not want to marry you, then you will have to remain single and celibate for as long as the other person is alive. If the other person wants to marry you but you do not want to, then that is being irresponsible. Worse, if you marry someone else instead, you would have committed adultery, which is a mortal sin.

*Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.*

(1 Cor 6:18)

*If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.*

(1 Cor 3:17)

Apostle Paul tells us how seriously God views sinning against our own bodies, because we are His temple. We must thus honor Him by upholding His principle.

*Can a man take fire to his bosom,  
And his clothes not be burned?*

(Prov 6:27)

It is often a tendency of youth to explore the limits of our capabilities.

Similarly, teenagers like to test the boundaries; they want to see whether they can run all the way to the cliff’s edge, lean over, and try not to fall into the ravine below! However, the reality is that those who lean over once too often fall to their deaths; those who play with fire will burn themselves. An example of such risky behavior is heavy petting. While the couple may claim they “know when to stop,” there may be one occasion where it leads to oral or penetrative sex. Therefore, do not be swayed by arguments that “everybody is doing it.” Do not allow yourself to be emotionally blackmailed into physical intimacy, and do not be afraid of losing the other party. Teenage

” *True love waits. No partner who honors God and loves you will force you to indulge in sexual activities, prohibited by the Bible. It is important to God that you stay holy. If your holiness is as important to you as it is to God, you will find a way to stand against the tide.*

romances rarely lead to marriages, let alone long-lasting marriages.

### Best Friends Forever?

We must also be careful if we have a best friend of the opposite gender. While there is nothing wrong with communicating with someone of the opposite gender, be aware that one-sided romantic feelings may develop. One person’s platonic care and concern may be misinterpreted by the other. The principle to uphold in this case is that we must not be a stumbling block to our brethren (cf. Lk 17:2). Think twice (or even three or four times) about our actions. For example, if someone of the opposite gender keeps on texting you, do not

reply to every message.

### Minimum contact, maximum restraint

This is the principle we should be always guided by. We maintain minimum contact because we do not want to give either our carnal desires or the devil an opportunity to work. We exercise maximum restraint because we have seen even ministers of the church fall prey to sexual sin.

The Bible describes David as a man after the heart of God. He was not lustful. Yet, in his carelessness, he yielded to his desires and committed the egregious sin of sexual immorality. This reminds us that no human is impervious to this sin. Do not think too highly of yourself (Rom 12:3). Never overestimate your strength, never underestimate your weakness.

### CONCLUSION—WAIT ON GOD

Your friends may all be dating and enjoying their teenage romances, but as sons and daughters of God, we must stand firm against the tide. Do not worry that the person you like will be taken, or that you will be left on

the shelf. God has already prepared someone for us, if His will is for us to be married. There is no need to jump the gun by dating a series of partners, and, worse, lose our spiritual life in the process.

In addition, if you are ready to engage in a serious relationship leading to marriage, always remember that true love waits. No partner who honors God and loves you will force you to indulge in sexual activities, prohibited by the Bible. It is important to God that you stay holy. If your holiness is as important to you as it is to God, you will find a way to stand against the tide. ★

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?

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#### **SUBMISSION INFORMATION**

Please email electronic files of articles (Microsoft Word) to [manna@tjc.org](mailto:manna@tjc.org).

Please direct any questions to [manna@tjc.org](mailto: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

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## *Author Guidelines and Editorial Calendar*

### **Issue #84:**

### **TJC at 100: The Grace That Has Brought Us Here**

**Articles due: May 1, 2017**

The year 2017 marks the centennial of the True Jesus Church, the restored apostolic church established by the Holy Spirit during the latter rain period. As the end-time true church, founded on unshakeable truth and equipped with power, we are commissioned to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth.

This is the time to reflect on our humble beginnings and the phenomenal growth that followed. While we are grateful for a hundred years of spirituality and grace, we need to look into ourselves honestly—how does the second half-century of our existence compare with the first? Are we pressing on upwards or are we slipping down? Do we still model ourselves after the apostolic church and courageously make a stand against and apart from the worldly religions and philosophies? Is our zeal sufficient to propel us forward till the furthest lands are conquered with the gospel?

In this issue, we not only reminisce on how God has preserved and nurtured His church thus far, throughout many challenges, we also take stock of our current state—both our strengths and shortfalls—and let God's yardstick determine the gap we need to close before we are ready for the next step forward.

*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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