



True Jesus Church

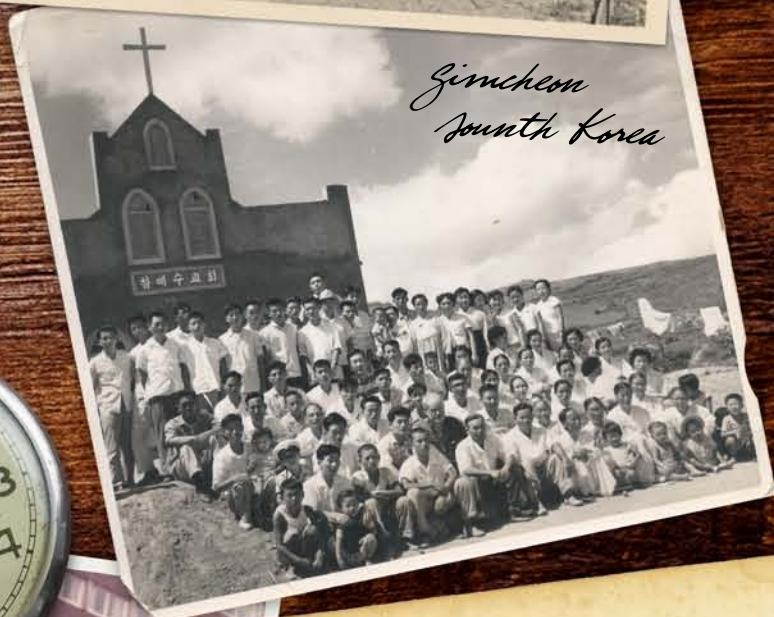
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Issue 84

TJC at 100:
The Grace That Has
Brought Us Here



True Jesus Church at 100

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. In the articles *In Retrospection and Reflection: One Hundred Years of Spiritual Grace*, *My Journey of Serving the Lord*, and *A Letter to Our Youths: Sharing the Grace of God*, veteran church workers share the amazing grace with which God has blessed His church throughout the last century, and the simple but powerful faith manifested by the early believers.

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? These questions are posed and explored in the theme articles *Straight From the Heart* and *Revive the True Church (Part 1)*.

In this issue, we also reminisce on how God has preserved His church through many past storms in *Complete the Construction of the True Church (Part 1)*. But we also see God's continuing love and protection over His church today in the testimonies *God Opened a Way for His Church* and *God's Unfailing Grace in a Troubled Land*, which reveal the recent challenges the church has faced in Papar, Malaysia, and Mindanao, Philippines, respectively.

We know that, come what may, God will always abide with and nurture His beloved church. But, as His church, we also have our part to play. As we read in *Marching to Zion* and *Passing Down the Faith*, we have much work to do in our journey to perfection, ensuring the uncorrupted and true faith is preserved and passed down from generation to generation. So, at this juncture, let us 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.

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In Retrospection and Reflection:

Shun Dao Hsieh
Taichung, Taiwan

One Hundred Years of Spiritual Grace

Editor's note: Elder Shun Dao Hsieh was baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ on July 5, 1947 in Huwei, Taiwan, and he later joined the full-time ministry in September 1955. After seventy years in the Lord, Elder Hsieh has seen and heard many miracles. This article is an excerpt of his reflections on the early days of the True Jesus Church in Taiwan, which he shared at the Holy Work Symposium held in Malaysia in March 2016 by the International Assembly of the True Jesus Church.

THE GOSPEL REACHES TAIWAN

The True Jesus Church was established in Beijing on January 2, 1918 (the twentieth day of the eleventh month, 1917, according to the lunar calendar). The gospel, as preached by the

“Does the zeal and joy that epitomized the church in her infancy still drive the centenarian church today?”

True Jesus Church, reached Taiwan in 1926 when Elisha Huang invited Barnabas Chang to share the truth. Eight early workers came from China, boarding the Japanese ferry at Xiamen on March 2, and arriving at Keelung Harbor the next day. Among these workers were Thomas Guo, Luke Kao, Yuan Chien Chen, Dao Yuan Wu, Ching Lung Wang, and Shing Ming Huang.

Through the efforts of these pioneer workers, God established

the first True Jesus Church in Taiwan, at Shengang, on March 11. Shortly after, the church in Niu Tiao Wan was established on March 16, followed by the church in Qingshui on April 3. Within a month, three churches had sprung up—a great miracle in the history of Christianity in Taiwan.

This pioneering mission was effective because God's grace and guidance were upon His workers, testifying that the truth they



True Jesus Church in Nan'ao.

preached was the gospel of salvation (Eph 1:13; Mk 16:20; Heb 2:4).

In addition, God's hand was very evident at the newly established church in Shengang. Week in and week out, many who attended the church services experienced miracles from God; and once they understood the truth, they received baptism. The church atmosphere was joyous—believers testified of God's grace, discussed the truth of God, sang hymns, prayed earnestly, and praised the Lord. Most were reluctant to leave the church hall after services were over.

As the True Jesus Church turns one hundred, we should ask ourselves if the zeal and joy that epitomized the church in her infancy still drives the centenarian church today. Do we have the same simple heart of faith and obedience as the early workers, who relied fully on the Holy Spirit to complete the work? Let us reflect on these questions as we recount the early days of the church in Taiwan.

OFFERINGS OF EARLY WORKERS

Today, when we consider serving the Lord, we often limit the scope of our offering to a portion of time and effort we can spare to do God's work. But the early workers did not delineate their offerings in such a way. They served God through their careers, by offering their hard-earned cash to build churches, and even financed missionary work out of their own pockets. Some noteworthy examples are shared below, so that we may understand

how these early brethren loved God and repaid Him through diverse forms of service.

1. First seeds in Taiwan:

Elisha Huang financed Barnabas Chang's first missionary trip to Taiwan. He also funded the building of a church in Xianxi so the believers, who were mostly poor and few in number at the time, could gather in one place.

From this one seed, the church in Xianxi grew and prospered, such that the congregation would go on to build another church in Shengang in 1960. The original Xianxi Church is now known as Shengang Church.

2. An entrepreneur who loved God:

Elder Shun Ming Kuo was a prominent entrepreneur in Taichung. When he was a deacon, he was also an industrious businessman, but he never missed Sabbath services, morning prayers and evening services. He would always contribute money to the Taiwan General Assembly (GA) and local churches when there was a need. He also sponsored students to further their education, without expecting repayment. He would say, "When you're successful, help those who need it. That is the best way to repay me."

3. Serving God through business:

Elder Yu Lin Tsai from the church in Nanmen, Tainan, was a businessman who decided to take up full-time ministry after World War II. However, he soon found that his gifts were suited more to business than to ministry, and he was advised

to serve God through his business. He redirected his footsteps and returned to the world of business, but with the focus of serving God. God's grace was upon him, and his enterprise was successful. And in turn, he built a church building at Nanmen, and constructed the first True Jesus Church nursing home for the elderly members.

These are just a few examples of the faith of the early True Jesus Church believers, but they are representative of the simple and generous spirit that characterized the church at the time. Just like the apostolic church, who willingly shared their possessions and money and provided for the needy among them (Acts 4:32–35; 11:29), many early True Jesus Church believers shared their blessings from God to benefit the church.

As the Bible says, "Therefore, as we have the opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10). When we help others, by financial means or otherwise, we should not expect repayment of any kind. If we are in the position to give, then we should give freely, in the hope that our beneficiary will help others in turn. Whether or not our recipients are of the faith, we should expect nothing in return. If we can stir up this type of selflessness in the church, then we will truly be manifesting the great love of Christ.

The apostle Paul continued to work to support himself and the church (Acts 18:3; 2 Thess 3:8), but he did so alongside preaching the gospel. We should work hard in our vocation, but only with the view of shining God's light through our work, and providing for ourselves and the wider church. We should

“If we are in the position to give, then we should give freely, in the hope that our beneficiary will help others in turn.”

never let our jobs become an excuse for neglecting our faith and service to God. The early True Jesus Church brethren knew that successful careers were from God, and for that reason, they never put their jobs before the work of God. They endeavored to tithe on time, refrained from working on Sabbath days, and brought their families to service. And they would also repay God's grace by offering their time and money freely.

Throughout the history of the True Jesus Church, new believers would come to Christ with this same heart. But as the years pass, maintaining this heart of simplicity can become difficult. And for those second- and third-generation believers who were born into the church, who have never had to seek God for themselves, it is easy to take things for granted. How willing are we to sacrifice time and money to spread the precious truth? How many of us would offer out of our own abundance to help our less well-off brothers and sisters establish themselves in the faith? Are we willing to "count all things loss"—let go of all our worldly achievements, possessions and status—in order to gain Christ (Phil 3:7-9)? These are questions worthy of our consideration.

SIMPLE FAITH OF THE EARLY BRETHREN

Some members wonder why we hear so many testimonies of God's miraculous grace from past decades, but we witness few miracles in the church today. My answer is that, before Taiwan implemented national health insurance, most people could not afford to see a doctor or receive medical treatment. When believers

“The early TJC brethren knew that successful careers were from God, and for that reason, they never put their jobs before the work of God.”

became ill, they would have to rely on the free Physician—the Lord Jesus. When they prayed, the Lord had mercy on them, and miracles would happen. Now that we have easy and affordable access to doctors and medicine, they are our first port of call when we fall sick.

Miracles of healing are just one manifestation of a simple faith, uncomplicated by alternative solutions and possibilities. In our modern world of scientific enquiry and technological advancement, it can be tough to humbly rely on God alone, against all logic, and believe that He will mercifully meet our needs. But this is exactly what the early brethren did, and for that reason, they witnessed the amazing works of God. Here are just three examples from those early years where the lives of our brethren were transformed through a simple and steady faith.

Testimony 1: In 1950, I was pastoring the church in Lunwei as a newly ordained minister. After the Sabbath service, a sister asked me what had happened to my thumb. I answered her, “I injured it when I was cutting wood.”

She smiled and said, “Thank the Lord.” Incidentally, this sister was nicknamed “Thank-the-Lord.”

I muttered to the youths beside me, “How could she thank the Lord for my injury?”

A brother replied, “She was right to thank the Lord.”

I was puzzled. “Why is that?”

He replied, “The Lord prevented you from cutting off your thumb completely.”

“And what if I had cut off my thumb?”

“Then we would thank God that you still had four fingers!”

The Bible says, “Rejoice always... in everything give thanks” (1 Thess 5:16, 18a). Those who have a simple faith will always look on the bright side of every situation.

There is a story about how Sister Thank-the-Lord got her nickname. Before she believed in Jesus, she had a strange illness. She was afraid of the light, and the wind would cause a painful sensation on her skin. She would sit under a mosquito net all day long, even when she ate her meals.

A senior sister from the church in Lunwei came to preach to her one Sabbath, saying, “If you go to church with me, the Lord Jesus will heal you!” Thank-the-Lord believed and agreed to go. When she put a covering over her head, the senior sister said, “You don't look nice with that on,” and told her to take it off.

Miraculously, for the rest of the day, she did not feel any pain or ill-effects from the wind. When she returned home, she no longer felt pain or needed her mosquito net. After that, she persistently sought the truth and was baptized in the name of Jesus. Having received this

amazing grace from God, she would always thank the Lord in all things, which is how she got her nickname.

Testimony 2: On August 15, 1945, the Emperor of Japan surrendered to the United States of America, marking the end of World War II.

In 1946, the church in Nan'ao in Yilan County was under great persecution. A certain church was spreading rumors that the True Jesus Church was a cult and should be exterminated. Later, in 1955, Preacher Kai Chou Hung testified what the church in Nan'ao underwent at the time.

Preacher Hung said, "We were targeted two times a week, often in the middle of a sermon. When the persecutors came, they would ring a bell so that the brothers and sisters would know they were coming. Nevertheless, no one would leave his or her seat. Our attackers were strong men, and they would call out, 'Do you want to believe in Jesus?'"

"Our brethren would answer, 'Yes!'"

"Then they would shout, 'Do you want to believe in our church, or True Jesus Church?'"

"The brethren would reply, 'True Jesus Church!'"

The attackers would push the members to the ground, grab them by the hair or ear, and hit them on the head. They would beat them with a stick and step on them until they passed out. They also targeted Preacher Hung, as the church's minister, brutally beating him until he threw up blood and passed out. Despite this, Preacher Hung continued to minister every day. Such persecutions also did not deter the faith of the Nan'ao believers.

Around that time, some truth-seekers from Nan'ao decided to get baptized at the Luodong evangelistic and spiritual convocation. The minister asked them why they would want to receive baptism when they would be persecuted at Nan'ao. They answered, "If we receive baptism and are then beaten

to death, we will be saved. But if we are beaten to death, having not been baptized, we won't be saved." The church council unanimously agreed to baptize them for three reasons: they believed in the gospel that saves; they were not afraid of persecution after knowing the truth; and their faith was firm. After the convocation, they joyfully returned to Nan'ao, ready to face any persecution that might come.

One Sabbath, an angel appeared to the brethren during a service at Nan'ao, and told them, "Violent attackers will come to persecute you today. I will lead all of you to another place. Do not return home to pack, just bring your Bible and hymnbook. Come, follow me."

The angel brought them to a broken hanging bridge that had been marked as unsafe and off-limits. He spoke to those behind him, "Pay attention to where I put my feet; if you step where I do, you'll be safe." Not long after, their pursuers came after them. But they were afraid to cross the rickety bridge. God



True Jesus Church in Fushi.



True Jesus Church in Pu-Zi.

“It can be tough to humbly rely on God alone, against all logic, and believe that He will mercifully meet our needs.”

opened a way for the believers, just as He did for the Israelites fleeing the Egyptian soldiers (Ex 14:21–28).

After they had crossed the bridge, the angel disappeared. The members who escaped that day belonged to the indigenous Atayal tribe. They followed the mountain road and arrived at Fushi Church in the Hsiulin Township, Hualien County. The members of this church were of the Truku tribe, who spoke a different language from the Atayal. Fortunately, both tribes were educated under the Japanese system, so they could communicate in Japanese. After learning the plight of the Nan’ao brethren, the Fushi brethren were full of love and lent the visitors some land to work and live on.

After a few years, the local government sent officials to the Nan’ao Township to declare that, because the True Jesus Church is a legally registered religious organization, any discrimination against the church would be against the law. The brethren who had

hidden in Fushi could now return to Nan’ao peacefully.

Aside from the church in Nan’ao, there are now seven more churches in that area. I believe this persecution was a catalyst in the growth of the church. Hallelujah, thank the Lord!

Testimony 3: In October 1955, during the practical portion of my theological training program (TTP), I was delivering a Sabbath sermon at the church in Luodong. It was entitled, “The Love of the Lord Jesus.” After the sermon, Deaconess Maria Chiu came up to me, held my hands and broke down in tears. “I didn’t know the Lord Jesus loves me so much!” she said.

Later, I learned that, before Deaconess Chiu’s husband died, he objected to her going to church. Every Sabbath, she would sneak out early in the morning by the back door. On her return, before she walked through the front door, she would prepare herself to be beaten. Her journey to and from church

was also perilous—she had to crawl slowly across a wobbly bridge over a deep valley. Though she faced such difficulties to come to church every Sabbath, she never grumbled against the Lord. In fact, she was always smiling and full of joy.

Testimony 4: On March 2, 1962, the Taiwan GA sent me to the churches in Chiayi and Neipu. On Monday, March 5, a Neipu church board member informed me of an elderly lady who had been diagnosed with end-stage tuberculosis. The doctor had told her not to buy any more medicine, but to buy her favourite foods. Because her doctor could offer her no more hope, she turned to her neighbor, a sister from the church in Neipu, for help. She wanted to believe in Jesus and to come to church.

The church board member invited me and few members to the lady’s house so we could pray for her. I took the opportunity to explain some basic biblical truth to her, and asked, “Can you throw away your medication so we can pray for you?”

At first, she was unwilling because she could not afford to replace the medicine. I clarified, “I don’t mean that you can’t take medication after believing in Jesus. But I want you to experience the power of God. If you keep taking medicine while praying to God at the same time, and you recover, then you might think it was the medicine that healed you.”

She understood and threw away the medicine. After we had prayed for her, I invited her to attend church service. She said, “I’ve been in this bed for four months—how can I possibly go to church?”

I replied, “If you decide to stay in bed, then you’ll never leave it. But if you’re willing to come, then God will give you strength.”

She immediately responded, “I will come!”

That night, she brought along a warmer, and required the help of two sisters to walk to church. Over the course of four days attending church, with the prayers of the brethren aiding her, she gradually needed less and less support, until finally the day came when she needed neither her walking stick nor her warmer.

On the morning of the fifth day, she felt well enough to wash her clothes in the river—something she had not done for the last four or five months. Her neighbors saw her at the river and testified to others, “The Lord Jesus has saved her—she no longer has tuberculosis.” This news brought a few more truth-

seekers to the church, including the lady’s husband, who also received the Holy Spirit.

On the Sabbath of May 19, after the end of the Neipu evangelistic and spiritual convocation, six people, including this lady and her husband, were baptized. After this, even more people came to the church to seek the truth. In the month of June, we held two more baptism sessions for eleven people in total—a wonderful outcome sparked by the faith of one lady.

In 2013, I attended this sister’s funeral. Even though she was given a terminal prognosis at the age of fifty-two, she went on to live to the age of 103. Her faith has been passed down to the fifth generation: her great great grandchildren are in the Lord.

IN RETROSPECTION

Today, many of us live in relative comfort—we do not face persecution for our beliefs, and we have access to doctors and medicine when we are ill. However, there are True Jesus Church members in certain parts of the world who are not so well placed. We find that these brethren, like the early workers in Taiwan, cherish their faith so much more and rely on God more fervently than those of us living in liberal and economically stable countries. It is in these countries that we still see the great power of God manifested in many miracles and wonders.

A Taiwanese brother once shared this observation with me: The early

believers in Taiwan had the heart of a child—simple and innocent. They were like a family who spoke openly to one another. If anyone behaved inappropriately, they would gently correct this person face to face. And they rejoiced in the Lord, always. Nowadays, the brethren are like adults—well educated and knowledgeable. They are almost like strangers to one another, speaking very selective words. In the face of inappropriate behavior, no one would be assertive enough to point it out. Attending church to worship God is like another task—we come to just learn about the Bible. The family-like connection between members has weakened, and so has our thirst for the word of God and joy in the Lord.

As the True Jesus Church reaches her one hundredth year, we should ask ourselves if this brother’s assessment is correct. Let us aspire to attain the simple and steadfast faith that our forebears had, and cultivate a child-like heart. Because the early believers had abundant faith, Jesus would heal them. They suffered for the sake of Christ and did everything with thanksgiving and joy in the Lord; in return, they witnessed the wonderful grace and power of the Lord. If we regain this innocent and trusting heart of a child, then we, too, will see the hand of our loving heavenly Father working in our lives and in His church.

“Let us aspire to attain the simple and steadfast faith that our forebears had, and cultivate a child-like heart.”

Straight from the Heart

Editor's note: This article was adapted from a report written for the 2016 Holy Work Symposium held by the International Assembly of the True Jesus Church, which took place in Malaysia in March 2016.

Every True Jesus Church believer knows these facts:

1. Our Lord Jesus entrusted us with the commission to preach to all nations and make disciples of all men.

2. This divine commission is of utmost importance because once the true gospel of the kingdom has been spread throughout the world, our task is done and the world will end.

However, knowing these is insufficient. More crucially, how

do we go about fulfilling this commission? As the True Jesus Church commemorates her centennial year, this is a pertinent question for us all. The signs that we have seen in recent times portend an imminent end. How can we accomplish this task of preaching to the whole world?

HALF-HEARTED EFFORTS?

World evangelism is a topic that has long been, and continues to be, widely discussed at many different levels within the True Jesus Church. We are, understandably, eager to live up to the role that our Lord has entrusted to us, so we strategize and craft ambitious plans. The strategic discussions we hold on

world evangelism are appropriately expansive, with such titles as: “Globalization and Prospects of the True Jesus Church” and “Global Evangelistic Strategies.”

But after all the discussions, with our passionately articulated opinions recorded, what happens next? A quick scan will reveal that nothing much has changed over the years. The workers who were laboring in the fields years ago are the same few continuing today. What has happened to those ambitious plans that were discussed and presented to the church?

We may point to the progress achieved. The church has produced a full range of evangelistic pamphlets,



“A quick scan will reveal that nothing much has changed over the years. The workers who were laboring in the fields years ago are the same few continuing today.”

and a website accessible to the whole world. We have a handful of workers toiling hard to bring the gospel to those who have not yet heard the glad tidings. By God's grace, we continue to have baptisms in pioneering areas. So whenever we report on gospel outreach, we roll out statistics on the number of services conducted, the number of service attendees, and maybe even the number of people baptized in these new areas. These reassure us that we are heavily engaged in world evangelism.

But have we done everything we can? On honest and deeper reflection, we would admit that whatever we have done in world evangelism is only a token effort. There is a huge gap between planning and execution because of several factors: the lack of drive and passion, the lack of urgency, and the lack of sacrifice.

Problem 1: Lack of Drive and Passion

The problem is not a lack of awareness of our commission—we have read Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:16 umpteen times. Nor is it a lack of ability. We understand how to preach, learning from biblical examples as well as through experiences at work and in life. The first and fundamental problem is our lack of drive and passion to fulfill the commission. We do not possess the deep conviction of our earliest workers to spread the gospel.

This lack of drive can be seen at every level of the church organization. For instance:

1. The International Assembly (IA) has held many discussions on evangelism. But the execution of the work is weak. Those who deliver impressive presentations on evangelism are nowhere to be found in pioneering fields. Besides teachers, we need laborers, and field supervisors who toil alongside and mobilize the laborers. We entrust the leadership of the church to the IA Executive Council. But how many of those elected to spearhead our evangelistic mission are out in the field? Are we, in our commitment to proclaim the gospel, an example to the flock?
2. The general assemblies and coordination boards of the church are bogged down with a plethora of administrative and human issues. Planning often centers on solving administrative issues, and funds are channeled to physical assets. How much energy and resources are left over for preaching?
3. Local churches are trying their best to keep up with the daily management of the church.

These include the many services, fellowships and activities that are organized. It is no easy task to keep the structured program of the church running. But what about the immediate needs of sinners? Jesus Himself said, “I must preach the kingdom to other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent” (Lk 4:43).

4. Our preachers appear misnamed for they are more like theological lecturers and researchers. What led to this? Is it the structure of the church organization? Is it the type of training we give them? Perhaps not enough effort has been put into the area of producing true evangelists.

5. Our members enjoy edifying sermons week after week. But why have these words not had their intended life-changing effect, stirring us to arise and share these same words to our kith and kin?

Problem 2: Lack of Urgency

A second problem is our lack of urgency. We approach the work of evangelism as if the Lord's coming is not imminent, as if we have plenty of time left to save souls. We do not wholeheartedly commit ourselves to the task. What we do accomplish appears to be done with just nominal effort, undertaken to placate our conscience. We comfort ourselves, saying, “At least we have done something about the commission entrusted to us.”

“There is a huge gap between planning and execution because of several factors—the lack of drive and passion, the lack of urgency, and the lack of sacrifice.”

But do we realize and remember that every person who does not hear the gospel remains under the torturous burden of sin? Are we moved with compassion—as our Lord Jesus was—when we see the multitude (Mt 9:36)?

We must arise quickly because there are perishing souls who await deliverance.

Problem 3: Lack of Love

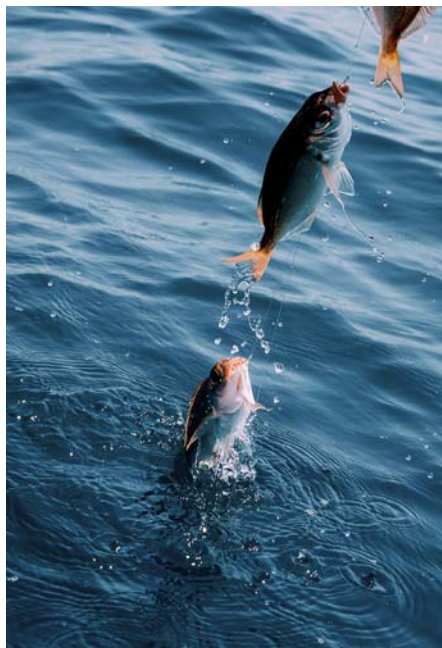
A third problem is the lack of a true spirit of service and a selfless heart of sacrifice. Most of us live self-centered lives, where we aim to satisfy ourselves and the call of our flesh. In many ways, we are no different from the people of our times—heartless, selfish, complacent, and entrenched in our comfort zones (cf. 2 Tim 3:2).

These words may seem harsh and unfair, as many of our actions are borne out of personal choice. But this is an honest observation and evaluation of the actions that we exhibit. We can see the inner intents of the heart through our observable actions—do we act any differently from the world around us?

We are supposed to be a people who has been separated and chosen to be different from the world. As we have been enlightened by the Lord, we must understand the hope of His calling, and know the riches of the glory of His inheritance (Eph 1:18). Why then have we not responded in love, with haste and urgency, to the work of saving souls?

A CHANGE OF HEART

When Moses spoke to the people concerning the building of the tabernacle and the holy garments of the ministry, the response was immediate:



Then everyone came whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing; and they brought the LORD's offering for the work of the tabernacle of meeting, for all its service, and for the holy garments.
(Ex 35:21)

The way ahead is clear. To get the church out of this crisis of evangelistic lethargy, all of us need a change of heart. Our hearts must once again be strongly stirred by the conviction that the world needs God's word. We must constantly refresh our drive to share God's word with all whom we meet. We must not allow our hearts to remain distant and numbed by the pleasures of the world.

This change of heart should happen at all levels of the church:

1. The IA: Instead of conducting further workshops or developing new plans, we should revisit the decisions of past symposiums on evangelism and implement them. The majority of the IA Executive Council are not involved in implementing the work of the IA.

We have to enlist these ministers to work in the fields.

2. The church: The church must be mission-driven, and we should identify leaders who can wholeheartedly focus on evangelism.

3. Ministers: We must continue to stress the importance of personal evangelism to our members. Preachers must lead the work of evangelism.

The Bible warns us that those who know the Master's will but do not carry it out will be severely punished (Lk 12:47-48). No one can feign or claim ignorance—the onus is on us to know the will of the Master and to accomplish it. Only then can we claim to be wise stewards, pleasing to the Master who, in turn, will make us rulers in His household.

May the True Jesus Church's one-hundredth year be the turning point in which we rekindle our zeal to fulfill God's commission, and stir up selfless love for those lost in sin.

Rain is Given to Zion

There are two distinct climate conditions in Palestine. For six months, from May to October, no rain falls and the whole land becomes dry and parched. After that comes the rainy season, from late October to April. This season may be divided into three parts: the former rain (early or autumn rain), the winter rain (with torrential downpours), and the latter rain (or spring rain). The first and third periods of the rainy season are mentioned quite commonly in the Old Testament. If we dig deeper into the spiritual significance of these biblical references to rain, we can better understand the special relationship between God and His

church. One hundred years after the True Jesus Church was established by the onset of the latter rain of the Holy Spirit, let us revisit how God's Spirit works in His church.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WATER (RAIN)

Water is a precious life gift from God. Its very existence highlights God's creative mastery: it brings balance to all ecosystems; it is a vital source of life; all living things rely on it for survival, growth and procreation; and most importantly, it reveals to us the underlying story of God's eternal love for humanity since the creation.

Divine Control Over Rain

The Bible teaches us that God used rain to cultivate His people. For example, the Law of Moses states that rainfall directly correlated with the Israelites' obedience (Deut 11:14). God promised to cause a drought whenever the Israelites persisted in their sins, leaving the land infertile, in order to break their pride (Lev 26:19–20). Later, Elijah pronounced God's judgment upon Ahab for the grievous sin he had wilfully committed, proclaiming a drought for three years and six months (1 Kgs 17:1, 7; Jas 5:17–18). And in Jeremiah's time, God withheld the harvest rain because of the people's transgressions (Jer 5:24–25).



There are various Hebrew words used to denote the three parts of the rainy season:

1. *Yoreh* (Hos 6:3) or *Moreh* (Joel 2:23) denotes “the former or the early rain”

The “early” or “former” rains commence in autumn, in late October or early November.

2. *Melqosh* means “the latter rain” (Prov 16:1, 5)

The “latter” or “spring” rains fall in March and April, after the coldest months of January and February have passed.

3. *Geshem* or *Matar* means “the rains” (Gen 7:12; Ezra 10:9)

Both terms are used in a very general sense. But the former has a more specific usage, to denote the heavy, even violent, rain that comes down in the winter.

Clearly, man’s reliance on rain shows us that, physically, we need water and, spiritually, it is our duty is to obey God (Lev 26:4).

Growth and Rain

The growth and fertility of a field are closely connected to the amount of rain it receives. From a biblical perspective, this also has a spiritual dimension. Ezekiel’s message, in chapter 34, discloses that God will make a covenant of peace with His people. Showers of rain are to follow, resulting in the trees bearing fruit (Ezek 34:26–27). These showers go beyond natural cycles of rainfall because they are initiated by God and directly correspond to His covenant with the people. Therefore, when studying rain in the Bible, we see an intimate relationship between rain and the spiritual growth or decline of God’s people.

Rain Is Given to Zion Alone

We see, then, that rainfall patterns are not just a result of the remarkable power of Mother Nature. The

rainy sub-seasons of Palestine, as presented in the Old Testament prophecies, reveal a deeper truth: that God’s Spirit would descend upon man to personally develop and expand His work, namely, by establishing His church on earth.

The Bible teaches us that God will pour out His “rain” twice in human history. By analyzing the message of Joel (Joel 2:23), we see that God has set His own schedule of when to give rain to Zion. It is important to note that the focus is on Zion, not the physical nation of Israel, indicating a spiritual teaching. The intention of the Lord is clear: the downpour of the Holy Spirit in two periods of time—the former rain and the latter rain.

The period of the former rain commenced when the Spirit

descended at Pentecost to establish the church on earth—the spiritual Zion (Heb 12:22; 1 Pet 2:6; Acts 2). But before God built up His church, several events had to be accomplished first. These include God’s manifestation in the flesh as Jesus Christ, His sacrifice, resurrection and imparting of the gospel to the disciples. After Jesus’ ascension, the Spirit came in two separate time periods: the first, during the time of the apostles (Acts 2:1, Joel 2:28), known as the early or former rain; and the latter rain, which established the end-time true church—the True Jesus Church—and will continue until the final harvest.

GOD WITHHOLDS HIS RAIN

In Psalm 46, God states that He would provide a plentiful environment for the city to flourish: God would plant, grow and sustain both crops and cattle. It is clear from these verses that the survival of the city was dependent upon the presence of God, who kept the city safe from the tumultuous storms of the world and ensured its continuous survival (Ps 46:4–6).

However, in Psalm 107, the same city is turned into a wasteland because the people were wicked in God’s sight (Ps 107:34). Physically, God withheld the rain for a long period of time, resulting in a dry and fruitless land. Spiritually speaking, God withdrew His Spirit from the people, who continued to practice wickedness.

“God’s Spirit would descend upon man to personally develop and expand His work, namely, by establishing His church on earth.”

Equally, Isaiah paints a vivid picture using the metaphor of the fruitful vine, representing the land, and the city, representing the people (Isa 32:12–14). Again, the city and fruitful vine are in a state of desolation, with thorns, briars and scorpions running amuck. The chaos and barrenness of the land point to the wickedness of the people: their godless behavior, corrupt ways and pagan rebellion. Isaiah depicts the destruction of God's people as being identical to briars and thorns being consumed by fire (Isa 9:18–19). Those who are cursed not only live without the Spirit of God, but are also dead spiritually.

It Is the Spirit Who Restores

Whilst this is depressing, Isaiah also confirms a transformation made only possible by the coming of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 32:15 describes the order formed from devastation, and prophesies the coming of the Spirit in two phases in human history—the first phase transforms the wilderness into a fruitful field, and the second sees the fruitful field flourish into a forest.

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Similarly, in Psalm 107, God reverses the barrenness of the land to make it fruitful once again:

*He turns a wilderness into pools of water,
And dry land into watersprings.
There He makes the hungry dwell,
That they may establish a city or a dwelling place,
And sow fields and plant vineyards,
That they may yield a fruitful harvest.” (Ps 107:35–37)*

God shows His mercy by stating He will restore the land, by pouring down His Spirit from on high (Isa 32:15a).

The Period of Drought after the Apostolic Church

In the Old Testament period, the two main reasons why God withheld rain from His people were idolatry and the blatant disregard of His

commands—in other words, they were not a nation governed by His truth (Deut 11:16ff; Jer 3:2–3; 14:2–6). These transgressions foreshadow the failings of the apostolic church. Judging from the epistles to the Galatians and the Colossians, as well as the Book of Revelation, the apostolic church had become idolatrous and exposed to heretical attacks, causing confusion amongst the believers and the departure of God's Spirit.

Paul also writes of future generations defecting from the church's true teachings, where the wicked would be exalted. We saw this happen after the demise of the apostles. As God withheld His Spirit, the church degraded into a secular organization. Unbiblical practices were incorporated into the church, blending human and pagan beliefs with the pure beliefs that the apostles once taught with great conviction.

The Spirit Continued to Work

Although God's Spirit departed from the church as it grew corrupt, He continued to work quietly and assuredly. The canonization and subsequent translations of the Bible, for example, points towards the work of the Holy Spirit (see Jn 5:17). On countless occasions, Satan-instigated leaders tried to destroy the Scriptures, to no avail. The perfect word of God has been kept intact in mysterious ways throughout the generations.



However, one thing is certain: during this period, the Holy Spirit did not work in men in the same way as when the apostles were alive.

GOD CULTIVATES HIS RESTORED VINEYARD

To strengthen our understanding of the Spirit's work and presence, we can study the restoration of the vineyard in Isaiah. The vineyard represents the nation of Israel at the time, which God had planted. However, this vineyard brought forth wild grapes (Isa 5:1-7). As mentioned above, the emergence of briars and thorns represents the corruption and rebellion of the Israelites (Isa 32:13; Mic 7:3-4; Ezek 2:6). This caused God to withhold His rain and allow the vineyard to be laid waste (Isa 5:6). But God would not allow the briars and thorns to remain indefinitely—He states that he will burn them completely (Isa 27:4).

The vineyard also represents the apostolic church, which became corrupted by false teachings and human traditions, leading to God withholding His Spirit from her. This is why the fight to destroy “briars and thorns” is depicted in such a dramatic fashion. Within the restored vineyard—the True Jesus Church—prompt eradication of briars and thorns is the only way. The challenge is that their growth can be subtle, but fast. By the time they were noticed in the first vineyard, the damage had already been done. Hence, the Light of Israel—God Himself—will be a fire and a flame, to consume briars and thorns in a single day (Isa 10:17f). This means that God will battle against corruption constantly, keeping watch over His restored vineyard night and day (Isa 27:3-4).

This analogy emphasizes the need to deal swiftly with heresies in the True Jesus Church. Since her establishment, the church has always corrected unbiblical teachings. Therefore, to allow wrong teachings to fester within the church will cause great damage. The Lord wishes for no harm to come to the vineyard, for He loves it and will water it at every moment, with great effort (Isa 27:3). God's mercy and restorative purging will take place when the church is willing to rely on the Spirit completely (Isa 32:15).

Relying on the Spirit to cultivate the restored vineyard means relying on God's word, which is also represented by rain in the Scriptures (Isa 55:8-11). God's words (promises), once spoken, are not spoken in vain. When rain falls, it nurtures the land, and God's words produce a similar soul-reviving effect in our lives.

The true church will only grow when she holds fast to God's words and His nurturing presence, which is also described as rain falling on grass before it is cut. It is like a shower that waters the earth (Ps 72:6; Hos 6:3). The result is that the righteous will flourish with abundance of peace (Ps 72:7). In a spiritual sense, the presence of the Spirit causes growth and instills life in the church, drawing souls to the household of God.

CONCLUSION

In light of man's wicked behavior, and the corruption within the history of Christianity, God planned two time-periods where the Spirit would establish His church. At the same time, God has reserved the harvesting work for those who belong to Him, at the time of the latter rain (which is now). God's plan is perfect and mysterious; it will run its course in such a way that, unless blessed with spiritual enlightenment, we may never understand.

These teachings highlight God's mercy and compassion on us and, as we are in the period of the latter rain, we should participate in the harvesting work. This is the duty of the True Jesus Church, the highest mountain of God, confirmed by the presence of the Holy Spirit. As we mark the centennial of the church established by the latter rain, let us continue to pray for the completion of the Spirit's restoration and revival work.

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Adapted from sermons by
Barnabas Chong
Singapore

Revive the True Church (Part 1)

The ascension of Jesus, when He bid farewell to His disciples, was a pivotal moment in the history of the church. It was at this point that He charged His followers to spread the gospel to the world; but He also told them to first wait in Jerusalem to receive power from on high. Sure enough, when Pentecost arrived, so too did the downpour of the Holy Spirit to establish Christ's church on earth.

This glorious event marked a period of great faithfulness for the disciples, who were led and empowered by the Spirit. But what began as a perfect church would shortly enter into decline. We can trace this from the subtle rebellion of certain wicked men in the early

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apostolic church, to the audacious alterations, even outright reversals, made by the Catholic church. The Protestant movement, set off by Martin Luther's call for restoration of the true faith, was a noble but misguided endeavor, which finally led to the chaotic profusion of Christian doctrines and denominations which we find today. From this history of the church, we can see man's ingenuity

and irresponsibility towards the doctrines he received from God. There came a time when a revival was needed—to revive the true church on earth.

The True Jesus Church is the product of this revival. Far from tailoring our doctrines to pander to the political and social demands of our age, the gospel we preach is the very same gospel Jesus handed to



His disciples—the very truths found in the pages of the Holy Bible. As the apostolic church was, so we are. This is why the True Jesus Church can be seen as “the revived apostolic church”—a church that preserves and protects the imparted, not invented, truth of Christ.

The True Jesus Church is part of a long line of miraculous interventions by God to call His beloved elect back to Him. From God’s compassionate warning to Noah of the impending flood, to His loving covenant with Abraham to give him children and to forever protect them, God continually shows that no matter how many turn away from Him, He never turns away from us.

Today, True Jesus Church members live in a world quite similar to the one Noah and Abraham lived in. Most people do not believe in the Christian God, and of the ones who do, many, wittingly or unwittingly, do not obey the full truth of the saving gospel. But if we are to be the Noahs and Abrahams of our age, if we are to be the revived apostolic church, then there must be no doubt as to what exactly we are reviving.

But where should we begin?

REVIVE OUR PASSION FOR THE WORD OF GOD

The apostle Paul writes, in Ephesians 2:20, that the household of God has “been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.”

So far so good. But what exactly is the foundation of the apostles and prophets?

In the following chapter, Paul



explains that he gained an understanding of the “mystery of Christ” through the revelation of the Holy Spirit (Eph 3:2–5). The mystery that was previously unknown to man—that the Gentiles would be fellow heirs of Christ’s promise—and the complete understanding of the salvation gospel was “revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets” (Eph 3:5). This is the foundation upon which the church is built—the revelation and word of God, as recorded by the apostles in the New Testament writings.

The rightful church of God must be founded on the living word of God. The True Jesus Church has never changed in this respect. The histories of both the apostolic church and the True Jesus Church are fraught with painful episodes of doctrinal disputes, hostile quarrels, and even breakaway groups. Yet, through it all, the gospel has emerged unscathed. Why? Because we knew the fundamental importance of the word of God—that everything we do must be based upon it. Today, do we still hold God’s word with the same respect?

Broadly speaking, there seems to be three kinds of people. We have, of course, the earnest Bible reader. Attending every Bible study, listening attentively to every sermon and taking notes, this believer understands the immense grace he has received from God, and treats the gospel with the same reverence that the apostles had.

Then we have the adversary. Plainly put, he is against most, if not all, of the church’s doctrines, and willfully opposes the truth we preach. Neither open to dialogue nor serious about actually learning more, there is little to be done for such a man. But he is not the main concern here.

The greater tragedy is the fate of the confused but complacent Christian. Here we have the well-intentioned believer who, from time to time, harbors a little doubt regarding a particular teaching. Sincere though he may be in faith, he is certainly not steadfast. This believer’s complacency leads him to deflect any questions he may receive from non-believing friends

with glib, unreflective answers, or to simply direct them to the nearest church minister.

Worse still is not how poorly this believer evangelizes, if he does at all, but how unanswered doubts and shallow faith leave him vulnerable to being misled. More than two thousand years after the establishment of Christianity, the Christian world is saturated with an abundance of different opinions, interpretations, translations and traditions. And everyone claims to be right. In this barrage of information, the half-hearted believer whose knowledge of the gospel consists only of “my preacher says so” and the odd Bible verse is in danger of falling for the convincing allure of false teachings.

There is a misconception that being familiar with the word of God is only so we can hold our own against the arguments of other Christians and non-believers. But the more important reason is that we have to know why we believe in what we believe. This is because the convictions we are most confident in are the ones that will influence our lives. As sincere as a Christian may be, if he knows only the *how* of salvation—the rites, the sacraments, the habits—but not the *why*, then he can never truly experience the fullness of his faith. He must see the

word of God not so much as a set of doctrines, but as a guide to living a meaningful life that pleases God—only then will the word of God be alive within him.

The apostles took the word of God so seriously that they willingly laid down their lives for it; they lived, and died, for the gospel. What about us?

REVIVE OUR ATTITUDE OF FOLLOWING THE HOLY SPIRIT

“Be filled with the Holy Spirit” is an expression commonly heard in the True Jesus Church. But what does it actually mean, and why should we care?

One of the things that stands out in the Book of Acts is how frequently the Holy Spirit is mentioned. The Book of Acts is the definitive account of how the early church grew, and the men and women who were instrumental in this growth. Yet, reading the book, one cannot help but get the impression that these men and women—though crucial in their roles—were not the main characters. In fact, there was only one true protagonist: the Holy Spirit. Acts 15:28 reads: “*For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things*” (emphasis added). These words are striking, for they convey an intimacy the

apostles shared with the Holy Spirit that is almost unthinkable today. Rarely do we hear: “The Holy Spirit, together with us, has chosen to make this decision” or, “I chose to do this or that because of the Holy Spirit’s advice.” But throughout the Book of Acts, we see how the Holy Spirit guides and transports Philip, instructs Peter, and protects Paul from danger. Behind the scenes, but also very much right in the middle of the action, we see the Holy Spirit actively helping God’s workers to accomplish their missions.

So why does this seem odd today? Primarily, because of a decline in our attitude towards the Holy Spirit. Nowadays, we mainly speak of the Holy Spirit as a spiritual milestone. Receiving the Holy Spirit has become merely a goal in the great game of our faith, and once we have achieved this, we quickly move on and forget about it. The Holy Spirit has also become a crutch to rely on when we need to comfort others. It is easy to repeat clichés about the comfort and guidance of the Holy Spirit in times of distress, but how many of us actually know how the Holy Spirit comforts and guides, or what it feels like?

The first revival in our attitude towards the Holy Spirit has to be the role we believe the Holy Spirit plays in God’s salvation plan. Yes, He is a guarantee of our salvation, a Rock, and a Counsellor. But He is not simply our backup plan in times of crisis. Instead, we have to rely on Him as an everyday partner with whom we can consult on even the littlest things.

Secondly, we need to rely once more on the Holy Spirit as our guide to the truth. The spirit of error of which the elder John forewarned (1 Jn 4)

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can only be resisted by the guidance of the Spirit of truth. Often, many of us who have received the Holy Spirit may read the Bible without consciously relying on the Holy Spirit to help us discern and understand the truth. Our worship and study become strictly rote, mechanical, uninspired. This is no way to develop our faith, and may lead to spiritual boredom and stagnation—ripe grounds for temptation to lure us away from the truth. It remains crucial that we involve the Holy Spirit in our growth in faith, remembering that the Holy Spirit not only dwells in the church, but is an ever-present Companion we must rely on.

One way to cultivate such an attitude is to be mindful of our spirit when we pray. The apostolic church greatly esteemed prayers. Their prayerfulness was a constant reminder for them of the powerful God, who was behind them every step of the way, and the strength they could receive as long as they continued to trust Him.

Ephesians 5:18 reads: “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit.” Paul is doing more than cautioning us about the dangers of drunkenness; he is asking us to think about what other vices and habits we have that might be distracting us from focusing on the voice of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s voice is strong and clear, but we must be willing to listen to it, or risk it being drowned out by the cacophony of the world’s distractions. One thing is certain, if we yield our whole spirits to the counsel of the living Spirit within us, we no longer need to fear the dangers of this world.

“ Jesus did not tell the eloquent, the confident, or the charismatic to preach. He told the Christian, the believer, the child of God to preach. Sharing the grace of God requires not charisma, but conviction.”

REVIVE OUR DESIRE TO COMPLETE OUR COMMISSION

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” (Mk 16:15)

These words are all too familiar to every Christian. What often escapes our attention, however, is how the disciples of Jesus responded to His grand commission—“they went out and preached everywhere” (Mk 16:20).

The disciples were ready to dedicate their lives to the gospel because they knew that theirs was the only gospel of salvation. From a humble band of 120, the early followers of Jesus quickly increased to number in the thousands because they knew that the fate of so many souls rested on their shoulders. The apostles understood the immense responsibility given to them. There was only one plan for salvation, and God had entrusted the task of bringing it to the world into their hands. If they did not preach this gospel, who else would?

So, what about us? Perhaps the size of the True Jesus Church has lulled us into the comforting thought that there will always be someone else to do the work of preaching. *Surely that is what the preachers are employed to do? Surely there are members more qualified than I?* It is easy to make such excuses. Some of us allow pastoral work, or the work of organizing and planning, to justify our lackluster evangelistic efforts. “I don’t have a gift for preaching,”

we tell others and, often, ourselves. This is nonsense. Jesus did not tell the eloquent, the confident, or the charismatic to preach. He told the Christian, the believer, the child of God to preach. Sharing the grace of God requires not charisma, but conviction. As Mordecai counselled Esther, there will always be others to do God’s work and fulfill His will, but to serve God is our privilege, our opportunity, and we must seize it when given.

IN SUMMARY

The True Jesus Church is the revived apostolic church. Our Spirit is of God, our truth is from Him, and His grace is evident in our lives and our ministry, day after day. But we need to live up to our status as the revived apostolic church too. This is hard work—it requires a revival in our attitudes towards the basic aspects of our faith, aspects we might have grown too comfortable with. We need this revival not because the church is dead, far from it. We need this revival because the more spiritually alive the members are, the more powerfully the Spirit of God will fill and lead His church to complete her mission. Let us live more fully for God than we ever have before.

To be continued.

Complete the Construction of the True Church (Part 1)

TWO TYPES OF FOUNDATIONS

Jesus once told a parable of a wise man and a foolish man, each building his own house. The wise man built his house with its foundation on the rock, so even when the storms raged, his house stood firm as a testament to his wisdom and the sturdiness of the rock. The foolish man, on the other hand, built his house on the sand. When the storms came, his house shook and collapsed, and great was its fall. In His parable, Jesus used the metaphor of building a house to illustrate the importance of a life built on His words and authority. If we extend the metaphor to the building of God's house—the church—the principle remains the

“Jesus used the metaphor of building a house to illustrate the importance of a life built on His words and authority. If we extend the metaphor to the building of the church, the principle remains the same.”

same. We should emulate the wise man by building the church on the rock that stands firm in the face of the wind and waves.

Within this context, the parable focuses on how to build, and the conditions under which we build up, the true church of God. To embark on this task, we should first ask ourselves, “Do we believe that the construction of the church can

ever be completed, and the church be perfect?” Inevitably, the church will face internal and external difficulties along the way, and these will challenge our efforts in the construction of the church.

If we consider the progress of the current works undertaken by the church, we may feel discouraged. Our evangelistic efforts seem to have plateaued, and we face various



challenges in pioneering areas. On the pastoral front, although most members have not deviated from the truth, they do not always enjoy attending services or listening to the word of God—the very foundation upon which we are to be built.

Despite all this, can we be like the wise man and continue building God's house on the rock? Can we persist in upholding the principles with which He began?

The storms will come and go, but God's church will remain standing amid the squalls. Throughout the last one hundred years of our church history, we have weathered many storms. Yet we have seen the consistent guidance of God in His church. Let us learn from three of our past storms.

THE FIRST STORM: STRUGGLE AMONG EARLY WORKERS

Among our early workers, a man named Barnabas Chang claimed he was the founder of the True Jesus Church. He even established his own general assembly in Nanjing, China, creating a division between the churches in northern and southern China. This storm raged for seven years, from 1924 to 1931, before the churches in China started to reconcile with one another.

Let us not be surprised that the true church established by the Holy Spirit faced such a turbulent storm, because even the apostolic church was not spared. The apostle Paul rebuked the Corinthian church for showing partiality and dividing the church members. The elder John likewise mentioned Diotrephes, who loved to have preeminence among the members of the church (3Jn 9).

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Hence, we see that the early workers chosen by God could, and did, fall because of pride. Despite this, the church will not fall. The construction of the true church will definitely continue until the work is completed.

THE SECOND STORM: CONFUSION OVER THE TRUTH

The second storm the True Jesus Church went through was confusion over the truth. False doctrines were brought into God's church, causing turmoil among members. Many false teachings have come and gone, but some have left lasting consequences.

One such false teaching propagated the idea of the devil's self-existence. It was first touched on in September 1950, when a church worker published an article in *True Holiness* (a publication similar to *Holy Spirit Monthly*) expressing his view that the devil is self-existing. He opined that although Satan is in opposition to God, his power is not equivalent to God's. Moreover, the church worker believed that even though Satan is self-existing, he is not eternal and cannot live forever. When the article was published, the church acted promptly and took a strong stand against this view, rejecting the teaching and highlighting its incongruence with biblical truth. This prevented the spread and damage of this false teaching within the church.

However, this teaching was re-introduced into the church in 1999, when a preacher, who has since been excommunicated, insisted that the devil is self-existing and not a fallen angel, and that the church had been wrong all this time. Regrettably, at the second occurrence, the church did not make as strong a stand as in 1950, but rather, out of openness and love, the church leaders permitted continued study into the matter. As a result, this heretical teaching seeped out and festered for thirteen years, to the detriment of the church and those who were deceived.

The damage inflicted by the false teaching and its propagator is clearly evident to all now, with ongoing strife between full-time workers and believers worldwide in the True Jesus Church. Therefore, the church must stand firm and act quickly against false teachings that contradict the truth, and be wary of any future reoccurrence of such teachings.

The storm of false doctrines will continue as we persevere in the construction of God's true church. When God leads His workers to build His church, the devil will also endeavor to hinder this work. We should recognize that this battle does not belong to you and me; it is a battle that the devil is waging against God. He will attempt to obstruct the work of salvation. This

is a storm that we must face until the end.

THE THIRD STORM: POLITICAL OPPOSITION

In 1917, the Holy Spirit worked through the early workers to establish His church, starting in Beijing, followed by around 1,000 locations in China over a period of forty years. However, after 1957, there was a major political shift in China, leading to the socioeconomic chaos of the Cultural Revolution, where religious movements were oppressed by the governing Communist party. This pushed our church in China into a state of hibernation. Members' faith was shaken and some even felt that the True Jesus Church was a house built on sand.

Nevertheless, there remained others who firmly believed that the church would rise above the storm. Although the tempestuous gales blew so fiercely that construction appeared to have ceased, these faithful members held fast to their belief that God would surely

guide them to complete the work. Although oppressed, they secretly maintained contact with other members. Those who were even braver continued to preach to their friends and relatives amid the political unrest.

It was not until the 1970s that the political situation in China improved. As the country became more open and liberal, the storm receded and the work of building the church resumed. The political oppression has been damaging; yet, the Lord's work has continued, because the construction of the true church is God's will. No matter how boisterous the wave or how strong the gale, the house built upon the Rock of Jesus Christ will stand firm.

"UNLESS THE LORD BUILDS THE HOUSE"

The true church has endured many stormy winds and waves, but has remained firmly established. The Book of Zechariah reminds us that God's house persists not through our own might and wisdom:

Moreover the word of the LORD came

to me, saying:

"The hands of Zerubbabel

Have laid the foundation of this temple;

His hands shall also finish it.

Then you will know

That the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you.

For who has despised the day of small things?

For these seven rejoice to see The plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.

They are the eyes of the LORD, Which scan to and fro throughout the whole earth." (Zech 4:8–10)

Although the hands of Zerubbabel had laid the foundation of the temple, these hands faltered and ceased work when faced with opposition. In time, God called on Zerubbabel to continue the construction of the temple, reminding him that the work would not be completed through his might alone (Zech 4:6). God's hands strengthened him, reinvigorating his wavering arms to complete the building of the temple.

From this, we learn that the rebuilding of the temple is not the work of man, but of God. Today, when we build up the church, we should not think of it as asking God to complete our work. Rather, it is the other way round—we should ask God to help us work with Him to complete His work.

These are two contrasting perspectives. If we ask God to work with us to complete the work, and we succeed, we may think God works to fulfill our ambitions and build His house according to our ideas. If we fail, we will become dejected and complain that God has not worked with us.



Conversely, if we hold the view that we are the ones working with God to complete His work, we will understand that the success we achieve is for the glory of God. If we fail, God will guide others to finish the work. Workers will come and go, but God's work to build His house will persist. Man is weak and may fail, but God is never weak and will never fail.

THREE PROCLAMATIONS FROM GOD

God will help us to build up the true church because it is His work. To encourage His workers with "good and comforting words" (Zech 1:13), God sent His prophet Zechariah to make three proclamations.

First Proclamation: "I Am Zealous for Jerusalem"

So the angel who spoke with me said to me, "Proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts:

*"I am zealous for Jerusalem
And for Zion with great zeal."'"*

(Zech 1:14)

We who are zealous in building the church of God should constantly reflect: are we maintaining the same level of zeal in our service, or have we, over time, become cold? As we serve, we can become disheartened because of the many disagreeable incidents that come our way. We may even ask: *Do I need to be so zealous? Why should I make such sacrifices? What do I gain from them?* If we continue with this line of questioning, we may become so discouraged that we no longer desire even to attend services, let alone serve. Our fervor wanes when we rely solely on our limited human zeal.

However, the Lord has proclaimed, "I am zealous for Jerusalem" (Zech 1:14).



God Himself is zealous to build His house and His zeal will never grow cold. Why are we so anxious then? Instead, we ought to reflect on our own attitude towards our labor for God's house.

Second Proclamation: "I Am Returning to Jerusalem with Mercy"

Therefore thus says the LORD:

"I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy;

My house shall be built in it," says the LORD of hosts,

"And a surveyor's line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem."

(Zech 1:16)

When God made this proclamation, the work on the temple had ceased for sixteen years. The faith of the post-exilic Jews was weak because, for sixteen years, they could not see any action from God. They probably thought: *We were so zealous in constructing the temple for You. When we met with difficulties, we resolved the minor issues ourselves. But now that we are experiencing major issues, why do You not help*

us? They doubted God and even murmured against Him.

So God proclaimed to them: "I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy."

At the right moment, God would return to Jerusalem. This meant that He would restart His rebuilding work, but it did not mean that He had left His people during the period of His apparent silence. We must understand that God has His time.

Third Proclamation: "My Cities Shall Again Spread Out through Prosperity"

"Again proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts:

"My cities shall again spread out through prosperity;

*The LORD will again comfort Zion,
And will again choose Jerusalem."'"*

(Zech 1:17)

The construction of the true church is the will of God. God is zealous for His church; He will return to Jerusalem with mercy and His house will surely prosper. In our service today, it may seem like our

“Let the call of Nehemiah move us to reflect on ourselves: Do we feel a sense of belonging in church, in this house we are building? Is this house that is built on the rock our house?”

efforts have yielded little progress. However, let us remember, God has promised that as long as we are working for Him, the work will flourish and the building of His house will be completed.

BUILDING THE ONE HOUSE AS ONE BODY

The work of building God's house on the rock is not one to be undertaken alone, nor should it be implemented only by the ministers. Rather, it is to be done by the whole congregation—the body of Christ, His church. Although Nehemiah had great fervor to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, he did not set about doing the work alone. Instead, he mobilized the nation, the Jews who remained or had returned to the holy city, to rebuild the walls. Nehemiah told the people:

“You see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lies waste, and its gates are burned with fire. Come and let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer be a reproach.” And I told them of the hand of my God which had been good upon me, and also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. So they said, “Let us rise up and build.” Then they set their hands to this good work.

(Neh 2:17–18)

At that time, the walls of Jerusalem had burned down. The people, fearing the storms of oppression, did not have the courage to rebuild the city wall. The Jews living among the ruins of Jerusalem felt that God

did not protect them, and that their enemies could destroy their efforts. They feared their work would yield no tangible results, like the house built on sand.

Nevertheless, Nehemiah reminded the Jews of the indignation that they had suffered, the humiliation of their beloved city, and the desolation of their home. But most importantly, he pointed out the injustice of turning a blind eye to the current state of their temple and city. Let the call of Nehemiah move us to reflect on ourselves: Do we feel a sense of belonging in church, in this house we are building? Is this house that is built on the rock our house?

We are a part of the body of Christ, working together to build the one house on the rock. As such, we must maintain our dignity. The young David is a good example of this. When he heard Goliath mocking Israel, David said, “For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (1 Sam 17:26b). David even made good his word by setting out to fight Goliath—not because he was an impulsive young man or that he thought he was a good fighter, but because he esteemed his dignity as one of God's people. David could not allow this uncircumcised Gentile to humiliate the people of God.

Many a time, we think that the duty to defend the church from attack lies in the hands of the ministers or the

church board, not the “common” believer. But David, who was neither a soldier nor a king, felt that sense of duty and acted accordingly. He was described by God as a man after His own heart (1 Sam 13:14). We, too, ought to remember that we are members, not guests, of God's household, and so must shoulder our responsibility.

Finally, Nehemiah encouraged the people by telling them how God had influenced the king to allow him to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. Amazingly, the king not only granted Nehemiah his request, but also contributed the materials needed for the reconstruction. This Gentile king, who played no part in God's house, recognized that the Jews would labor for the living God. He became a testimony to the Jews, proving Nehemiah's assertion that God was with them. They were inspired to proclaim, “Let us rise up and build.” Even when they faced opposition, Nehemiah re-affirmed the people's commitment, saying to their antagonists, “The God of heaven Himself will prosper us; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem” (Neh 2:20). Indeed, the Jews then worked until the wall was completely rebuilt. These people are worthy of our emulation. Though we may become disheartened in the face of challenges, we must keep these words of encouragement in our heart. Let us rise up and commit to doing this good work—to continue building the house of God on the solid rock.

To be continued.

Steven Shek
Edinburgh, UK

Serve like Christ

INTRODUCTION

*“The Lord God has opened
My ear;
And I was not rebellious,
Nor did I turn away.
I gave My back to those who struck
Me,
And My cheeks to those who plucked
out the beard;
I did not hide My face from shame
and spitting.
For the Lord God will help Me;
Therefore I will not be disgraced;
Therefore I have set My face like a
flint,
And I know that I will not be
ashamed.” (Isa 50:5–7)*

We might not immediately realize that this passage is about Jesus. But

read in the context of both the Old and New Testaments—bearing in mind the persecution, pain, and humiliation Jesus suffered when He came to this world—we understand that this is a prophecy of what Jesus would experience.

We also may not realize that this passage bears relevance for us, as end-time believers. According to the Book of Malachi, today we are both sons of God and servants of God (Mal 1:6; 3:17). As we have this same Christ-like dual status, we need to also serve as Christ did—faithfully, even in the midst of suffering. It is an honor and a blessing to serve the Lord, but we may face many obstacles in our service. This is why we become

easily discouraged, especially when our expectations do not line up with God’s intention. We may stumble or even throw in the towel after one too many disappointments. And if we experience suffering in our service, we may even succumb to self-pity.

But Jesus never had this kind of mindset; He never stumbled or gave up, no matter what He suffered. If we want to serve like Christ, then we must look closely at the above passage for insight into Christ’s servitude.

SPEAK GOD’S WORDS, NOT YOUR OWN

*“The Lord God has given Me
The tongue of the learned,*



*That I should know how to speak
A word in season to him who is
weary.*

*He awakens Me morning by morning,
He awakens My ear
To hear as the learned.” (Isa 50:4)*

When Jesus was in the world, He did not teach His own ideas; His teachings came from God (Jn 8:26, 40). Of course, Jesus is God Himself, but He was also fully man. Those who came to listen to Him saw Him as a mere man, a servant of God. Only by faith could they recognize that Jesus’ teachings were indeed the messages of God.

In Deuteronomy, God promised that He would raise up a Prophet like Moses, who would speak what God commanded Him (Deut 18:15). And later, in the time of Acts, Peter explained what would happen to those who rejected the Prophet’s message:

*“For Moses truly said to the fathers,
‘The Lord your God will raise up
for you a Prophet like me from your
brethren. Him you shall hear in all
things, whatever He says to you. And
it shall be that every soul who will
not hear that Prophet shall be utterly
destroyed from among the people.’ ”*

(Acts 3:22–23)

Jesus was that very Prophet, and He wanted the people to understand how important it was to heed His words. He spoke the truth not to condemn, but to bring salvation. So Jesus spoke with “the tongue of the learned,” in the words of Isaiah—that is, He did not rely on human eloquence, but on the authority of the truth. His intention was to turn people to God, so that they could repent and be strengthened. It was a heavenly message for a heavenly cause.

“ Do we use human reasoning when we seek to edify, and human insight when we plan our mission work? Or do we seek biblical guidance? ”

When we attempt to teach and guide others, do we rely on our own eloquence, or do we rely on the simple and powerful authority of God’s word? Do we use human reasoning when we seek to edify, and human insight when we plan our mission work? Or do we seek biblical guidance? To serve like Christ means we must first “awaken our ear” to God’s message—to “hear as the learned”—before we can speak with the tongue of the learned.

SERVE WITH COMPASSION

The service Jesus offered the people was in stark contrast to that of the spiritual leaders of the time. The Pharisees and the scribes looked down upon sinners, those most in need of their help, as illustrated in the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee (Lk 18:9–14). While the tax collector stood at a distance, in shame, the Pharisee self-righteously lifted himself above the tax collector. The Pharisee never considered how difficult it might be for the sinner to come before God.

In contrast, when Jesus looks at a person, He does not look at his outward appearance; He looks at the heart. He considers his situation. He looks past his fault and sees his needs. He would not so much as extinguish smoking flax (Isa 42:3). When Jesus sees the weary, He is moved to help them.

What would we do if we see a brother who appears to be

spiritually lazy? He may come to church services late or go about his church work half-heartedly. Our natural reaction may be to criticize him. But have we considered the unseen troubles he may be facing? Perhaps he is trying his best under difficult circumstances. Obviously, we should point out any blatant wrongdoing. But as servants of God, we need to have a compassionate heart and seek to understand the context before we speak, otherwise we could cause that person to stumble.

For example, think about how we react when a family member neglects his share of the housework. We would say, “Why aren’t you helping? Don’t you see how much there is to do? You’re so lazy!” Such an emotional reaction is understandable, but we need to look beyond our emotions and try to understand the other person’s situation. Perhaps he is depressed, or simply too tired, physically, to help with the chores. Likewise, the spiritually inert member may be weary and in need of strengthening. No matter what, he needs some understanding.

In times of hardship, it is comforting when someone understands what we are going through. Jesus can sympathize with us because He suffered and was tempted just as we are (Heb 4:15). He came to help the weary. Often, we say to Jesus, “I am tired and weak; have mercy on me.” We know how to advocate for

ourselves before God. But as God's servants, we also need to show this same love and mercy to other people. This means overcoming our natural tendency to be self-centered.

WAKE UP TO GOD

When Jesus was on earth, He was awakened morning by morning (Isa 50:4). As He woke from physical sleep, His heart and ears were also awakened, so that He could hear as the learned. He did not wake up to Himself, to do His own things—He woke to the Father. Each morning, He was ready to go to the Father to learn, and the Father was ready to teach Him.

When we wake up, how do we approach the day? As a parent or a teacher, we may endeavor to teach our children, but nothing seems to work. We get frustrated, our children get frustrated, and our relationship with them suffers. But each morning, we have two options: either we wake up to ourselves, or we wake up to God. If we commit to following the Father's teaching, instead of following our heart and feelings, then we will be better equipped to teach our children and serve our family.

Every day, Jesus woke up to the same people—His disciples. They were able to perform signs and miracles, and even share His teachings. Yet they would quarrel among themselves and argue over who was the greatest. It would have been natural for Jesus to wake up thinking, *Ah, this hopeless bunch; they've walked with me for years and yet they haven't changed.* But did Jesus have this kind of heart? Of course He did not.

Jesus' compassion and mercy are

new every morning (Lam 3:22–24). So when we wake up to the Father, we must give others the same chance. Just as God has given us so much love, support, and time to change, we should give others the same.

SPEAKING IN TRUTH AND LOVE

Jesus sees our weaknesses and knows that we are but dust. But His compassion only goes so far. When we are weak and turn away from Him, He does not say, "She's having a tough time; let it go. She's not in the right frame of mind; her heart is elsewhere." When we are lost and following the world, Jesus does not keep silent. He warns us.

Jesus spoke out when He was with the tax collectors and the prostitutes. Even though He was friendly with them, He told them that they needed to repent. Only if they would change and come to Him would He give them eternal life. Jesus is faithful; He sympathizes with our weaknesses, but He wants us to be reconciled with God. He speaks to us through different people—those who understand what we are going through but are compelled to speak when they see how we have neglected our spiritual life.

When Jesus taught, He did not teach as the scholars did. He spoke the word of God with authority, but

He also had love. He was kind, but firm. Is this not what we need in the family of God? Would we rather have others express the truth through genuine love, or have them hide it out of discomfort or fear of offense? Jesus always gives us true love, even though the truth sometimes hurts.

In the true church, we do not want to mollicoddle each other by only speaking pleasing words. Only through hearing the truth can our hearts truly change. The easy option is to say what the other person wants to hear, but that may not enable him to draw closer to God.

Jesus was not sent to speak God's words only to those willing to hear, but also to those who were unwilling. If it had been us, we might have asked, "Why send me to someone who won't listen to me? You know that they won't listen—what is the point?" But Jesus did not speak with partiality or personal preference. He treated everyone the same, even those who might have made Him feel uncomfortable. He reached out to everyone, even though He was rejected by His own people. He did not rebel against His mission to offer eternal life to all (Isa 50:5).

Are we only kind to those we love? How do we treat those we do not like very much, or who reject us? If we submit to our mission, as Christ did, we would not turn from anyone.

“If we fight for the truth and speak the truth, we may be rejected by our friends and family. But if we set our hearts to do God's will and stand for the truth, we will have done our part. We may suffer misunderstandings, but God will remember and help us.”

Today, to serve like Christ is to serve with love. To love is to act without expectation of repayment or reward. If a friend places great importance on every gift being reciprocated—remarking on every dinner bill they pick up that is not promptly followed by a favor in return—how long would this friendship last?

Our Lord Jesus does not keep score—He gives freely, in the hope that we will learn to be like Him. Today, as servants in God's household, do not seek or expect repayment for doing good. Do not look for results that show our investment was worth it. Jesus never served for His own satisfaction; He served to glorify the Father, and to further His mission.

SERVE IN SPITE OF SUFFERING

*"I gave My back to those who struck Me,
And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard;
I did not hide My face from shame and spitting.
For the Lord God will help Me;
Therefore I will not be disgraced;
Therefore I have set My face like a flint,
And I know that I will not be ashamed."* (Isa 50:6–7)

These two heart-wrenching verses reveal Jesus' sacrificial heart. While many people repay good with evil, Jesus did the opposite. He never turned away from being the Savior of the world, no matter what He suffered. He gave His whole heart and His whole self to His work. And He was resolved to complete His mission, despite knowing that He would suffer and be rejected, even to the point of death.

Why do we sometimes find ourselves unwilling to preach the gospel?



Maybe we are afraid of how people will react. Why are we sometimes afraid to tell the truth to our friends or brothers and sisters? Because we are afraid of how they will react. One who is deceived and has turned away from the truth will only have the chance to repent when the truth is spoken to them. So why would we withhold the truth? Even if they turn against us, at least we have tried. But if we let fear of suffering stop us from speaking the truth, then we have not done our best.

Jesus was disgraced; He was nailed on the cross as a sinner and mocked. He gave everything He had, completely and without reservation—He owed nothing more to God or the people. Even though He suffered greatly, Jesus knew that it was only for the short term. He understood that the joy that would come afterwards would be everlasting (Heb 12:2).

If we fight for the truth and speak the truth, we may be rejected by our friends and family. But if we set our hearts to do God's will and stand for the truth, we will have done our part.

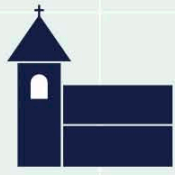
We may suffer misunderstandings, but God will remember and help us. He is the One who justifies us. If we hold fast to the truth, eternal life will be ours.

CONCLUSION

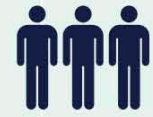
When Jesus was in this world, He did not withdraw from uncomfortable and challenging situations. He faced them head on and spoke the truth, so that there would be no confusion or uncertainty. Only then would people have the chance to escape from the grasp of the devil.

If we understand and speak the truth, then we show ourselves to be true servants of God. If we look to God for teaching and compassion every morning, and we speak His words in the face of rejection and suffering, then we will be able to serve like Christ. And at the end of our service on earth, we will gain the joy that awaits us in heaven.

GLOBAL STATISTICS OF THE TRUE JESUS CHURCH 2017



621
CHURCHES



121,464
MEMBERS*



143
PRAYER HOUSES



150
PLACES OF WORSHIP

TOP 5 COUNTRIES: MEMBERSHIP

55,650



TAIWAN

16,976



SABAH

7,525



INDONESIA

3,756



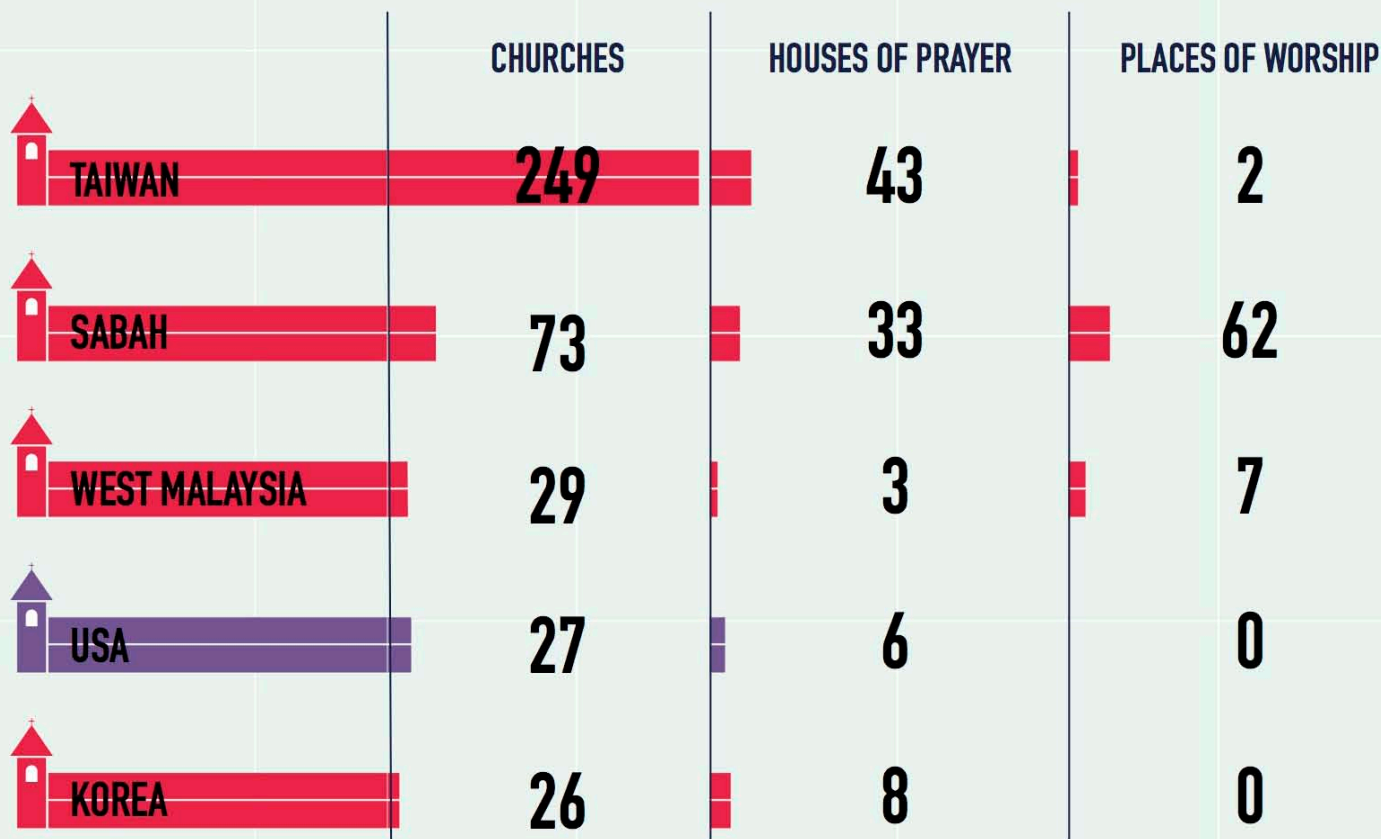
USA

3,500



KOREA

TOP 5 COUNTRIES: CONGREGATIONS



MEMBERSHIP BY COUNTRIES*

USA	3,756	Australia	1,002	UK	2,736
Canada	867	New Zealand	465	France	113
		Fiji	28	Germany	92
		Tonga	9	Austria	26
Taiwan	55,650	Papua New Guinea	19	Russia	32
West Malaysia	3,423	Samoa	10	Spain	73
Sabah	16,976			Italy	96
Singapore	1,363			Greece	23
Hong Kong	1,463				
India	1,383	Nigeria	400	Argentina	564
Indonesia	7,525	Liberia	150	Bolivia	9
Japan	887	Ghana	1,200	Brazil	53
Korea	3,500	Kenya	1,400	Dominican Republic	47
Thailand	286	Zambia	320	Chile	31
Philippines	1,647	Malawi	200	Ecuador	39
Myanmar	393	South Africa	800	Guatemala	6
Vietnam	10				
Cambodia	207				
Sarawak	77				
Macau	30				
Dubai	19				

*Where available

Stats source: Local General Assemblies, Coordination Boards and Coordination Centers of the TJC

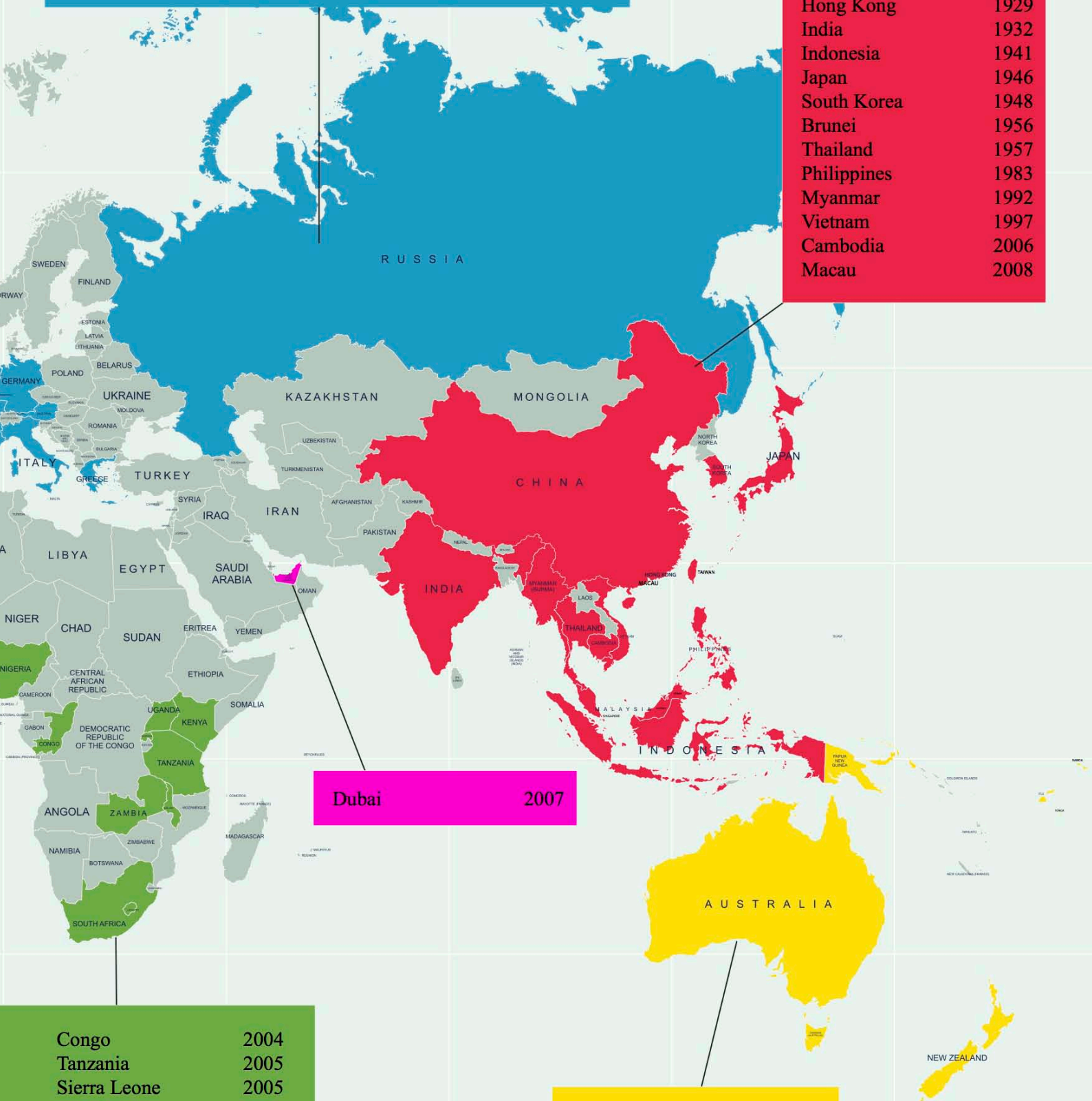
CURRENT GLOBAL SPREAD OF THE TRUE JESUS CHURCH

YEAR THAT SERVICES STARTED/FIRST PRAYER HOUSE ESTABLISHED



UK	1972	Russia	1995
France	1983	Republic of Ireland	1998
Germany	1985	Spain	2008
Austria	1992	Italy	2009
The Netherlands	1992	Greece	2010

China	1917
Taiwan	1926
West Malaysia	1927
Sabah	1927
Singapore	1927
Hong Kong	1929
India	1932
Indonesia	1941
Japan	1946
South Korea	1948
Brunei	1956
Thailand	1957
Philippines	1983
Myanmar	1992
Vietnam	1997
Cambodia	2006
Macau	2008



Dubai 2007

Congo	2004
Tanzania	2005
Sierra Leone	2005
Lesotho	2007
Rwanda	2007
Zambia	2008
Malawi	2014

Australia	1982
New Zealand	1990
Fiji	1994
Tonga	2004
Papua New Guinea	2010
Samoa	2011

A Letter to Our Youths: Sharing the Grace of God

Jonathon Chou
Hillsborough, New Jersey, USA

In January 2017, Elder Jonathan Chou retired after working thirty-one years as a full-time preacher. Manna invited him to share his experiences in faith and service to the Lord with the youths of the church.

“The more abundantly I experienced grace and love from God, as I learned and served Him, the more unworthy I felt.”

Hallelujah! Greetings of peace, in the holy name of Jesus, to our youths in the Lord. May the grace of the Lord be with you always!

COMING TO THE TRUE CHURCH

My father fell ill when he was forty-two years old. His baffled doctors were at their wits' end trying to cure his mysterious sickness. One of our elderly relatives—a member of the True Jesus Church—brought her fellow church members to our

house to pray for my father. When they came, my father was lying on the bed, almost unconscious. But as they prayed, he saw a vision; he was then filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues. He could feel his body lifted up, and found himself bouncing up and down on the bed in a kneeling position. After this, he was completely healed by the Lord. Hence, our entire family was baptized. We were a family saved—both literally and spiritually. The Lord had restored our father to us,

reuniting a family on the brink of disintegration. And we continued to live a life of peace and joy in the Lord. My father lived to the ripe old age of eighty before he rested in the Lord. Till this day, his testimony remains constantly in my mind.

GROWING AND SERVING IN THE TRUE CHURCH

I was baptized not long after birth and am considered a second-generation believer in the True Jesus Church. Growing up in the



church, I have witnessed God's great power and infinite grace. After working in secular society for ten years, I was very grateful to receive the opportunity to join the full-time ministry. The more abundantly I experienced grace and love from God, as I learned and served Him, the more unworthy I felt.

Young brethren in the Lord! Every young man and woman has aspirations and dreams for the future. I believe you are no different. You have been raised in the era of information explosion—the digital age—a world of artificial intelligence and rapidly advancing cutting-edge technologies. You live in an epoch where cultural development is at its peak. Such progress has irreversibly changed our human values—modern man's thirst for materialistic fulfillment and instant gratification of his desires is overwhelming. While life will present you with vast opportunities, it will also be full of challenges and snares. The smarter man becomes, the less he will rely on God. The more a man pursues social status and accumulation of wealth, the more he will neglect his faith, and the more easily he will lose himself to the base precepts of the world.

PERSEVERING TO THE END

Young brethren in the Lord! We must truly understand what a supreme blessing it is to be of the chosen children of God. We have received the word of life, the true grace of God, so we ought to stand firm in this grace (1 Pet 5:12). Amongst the brethren I grew up with in church, some are still holding fast to the truth and fervently loving the Lord; I thank the Lord in every remembrance of

this. However, there are also many who have lost the truth and left God; this thought grieves me. More recently, some youths have openly expressed their many doubts in their own faith. Consequently, they distance themselves from the church, causing all of us in the church much sadness and regret.

In our world today, there are many opportunities for success and growth. People generally believe that intelligence and hard work will lead a man (or woman) to success, wealth, a respectable social status and a luxurious life. The church also hopes to see her youths succeed in their studies and work, to contribute to society. However, we must remember that our hopes are not merely for and in this life. A Christian must have a more profound vision to see the true significance and value of human life. The Bible tells us that, by faith, Moses grew up and let go of his status as the grandson of the king, as well as the riches in the palace. Unwilling to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, Moses chose to suffer with the people of God, looking forward to the future reward. By faith, he saw the Lord who is invisible (Heb 11:23–25). David started off as a shepherd boy and became the king of a nation. However, he was not complacent over the glory and pleasures he

enjoyed as a king. Instead, he sought to always be in God's temple, inquiring of the Lord and beholding the beauty of the Lord. He was just waiting to see the Lord's face, and to awake in the Lord's likeness (Ps 27:4; 17:14–15). Only God is able to give us all-encompassing joy and peace, and the everlasting living hope.

CHERISH AND USE YOUR YOUTH

Young brethren in the Lord! Youth is a prime period. You ought to seize this time to know the Lord your Creator, to fear Him and rely on Him to guide your way (Ps 25:12). Man's times are in God's hands (Ps 31:15). As the proverb goes: "A man's heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps" (Prov 16:9). The Preacher wrote: "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise...But time and chance happen to them all" (Ecc 9:11). Solomon also urged: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths (Prov 3:5). It is God who gives you the power to create wealth (Deut 8:18).

Abraham was chosen and blessed by God, so that he might command his children to keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice. If

“The church also hopes to see her youths succeed in their studies and work, to contribute to society. However, we must remember that our hopes are not merely for and in this life. A Christian must have a more profound vision to see the true significance and value of human life.”



Abraham did so, God would fulfill what He had promised to him (Gen 18:18–19). On account of Abraham, God also blessed Isaac (Gen 26:3–5). He had his father's faith and thus obeyed God's instruction by sowing in Gerar. Despite the great famine, Isaac reaped in the same year a hundredfold (Gen 26:12–13). Although the local residents eyed him jealously, and the needs of his cattle compelled him to move around constantly, Isaac would build an altar to inquire of the Lord every time he arrived at a new place, even before he set up his tent and dug wells (Gen 26:25).

For Isaac, worshipping God took precedence over his family, which came second, with his livelihood in third place—this is precisely the model for our pursuit of a successful life. Apart from living for ourselves, we must make resolutions for the Lord, live for the Lord, and manifest Christ in our lives. Like the saints of old, we marry and have children, walk with God, faithfully practice the words of the Lord, fear God and love man. If we build this good

foundation of faith for ourselves, and hold fast to eternal life, then we would have attained life's true significance and value.

Young brethren in the Lord! Human life is short; let us not waste precious time. It feels like just yesterday when I was working hard to complete my studies and build my career. In a blink of an eye, I have become this old retiree. Memories of yesteryear are still vivid in my mind. However, the past is like the ephemeral mist at dawn. A person is like a sojourner in this life, and life is like a cloud and a dream. Beautiful moments, like flowers, will eventually wither and fall. Only our labor in the Lord will never be in vain (1 Cor 15:58). Man's hope is definitely not in this

life alone, so “what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul” (Mt 16:26a)? Once a man leaves God, he is like a branch detached from the tree—he can do nothing (Jn 15:5–6). Once upon a time, King Solomon used all his energies and abilities to pursue wisdom, status, wealth and pleasure. However, once he gained everything he desired, he realized that everything under the sun is but vanity, and all effort little more than grasping for the wind. Having spent his entire life searching, he came to this conclusion: “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all” (Eccl 12:13); and everyone has to face up to God's judgment.

[D]o not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor 4:18)

[May God] give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power. (Eph 1:17–19)

BEWARE OF EVIL

Young brethren in the Lord!

“We are living in the last days, which is an evil time. The devil knows his days are coming to an end, so he will use all his might and employ all kinds of trickery to deceive and tempt man into sin. Perilous times have come; let us not sleep, but instead watch, remain sober and pray.”

Since the days of old, advanced civilization is often accompanied by the proliferation of evil, which eventually leads to the judgment and destruction of God. The Lord Jesus reminded us to remember the days of Noah. The people then were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark. They were oblivious until the flood came and destroyed everything (Mt 24:37–39). The sulphuric fire upon the city of Sodom, the fall of great Babylon overnight, the city of Pompeii—filled with music, dance, revelry and extreme indulgence, turned into ashes in the blink of an eye as the volcano erupted—history is replete with many more examples that serve as warnings for us.

We must be discerning and recognize that we are living in the last days, which is an evil time. The devil knows his days are coming to an end, so he will use all his might and employ all kinds of trickery to deceive and tempt man into sin. Perilous times have come; let us not sleep, but instead watch, remain sober and pray. The will of God is for us to abstain from sexual immorality; each of us should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor (1 Thess 4:3–5). You must emulate the ancient saints in being the righteous people of your generation. Learn from Noah, Daniel and Job—they delivered themselves by their righteousness when faced with God’s judgment (Ezek 14:14). The hearts of people were evil during Noah’s time, and they were thus destroyed by the flood. Only Noah, who was righteous and blameless, obeyed God’s every instruction. Moved with godly fear, he prepared an ark and saved his household



Elder Jonathan Chou (bottom right) and his family.

(Heb 11:7). Solomon said: “Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment” (Eccl 11:9). You must be separated and consecrated—come out from sinful Babylon, lest calamity befalls you because of your sins (Rev 18:1–8).

TREASURE HIS GRACE

Dear brethren in the Lord! We were once Gentiles who were unworthy. However, in the Lord’s exceedingly abundant grace, He chose us. Like wild olive branches that have been grafted onto good olive trees, we must truly treasure this grace bestowed upon us, and hold fast to His word to the end (Rom 11:24–26). Be like Paul, who was determined to keep himself in the love of the Lord, writing that “neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:35–39). May the

grace of our true God, the love of our Christ Jesus and the movement of the Holy Spirit abide with us all, generation after generation, forever and ever. Amen.

Emmanuel.

His servant,
Jonathan Chou

Lemuel Leong
Papar, Sabah, Malaysia

God Opened a way for His Church

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I testify of how God has protected the local True Jesus Church (TJC) in Papar, a town some thirty-one kilometres from the state capital Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.

In the first half of 2016, the church in Papar received an almost constant barrage of harassment and persecution over a land-ownership dispute. Back in 1979, the church negotiated with the then-landowner of the neighboring property to open an access route between the main road and the church grounds. It was agreed that, in return for this access route, the land along the roadside boundary of the church property would be moved back by three feet for the

“The new landowners started to resort to unscrupulous means to pressure the church.”

landowner's use. Both parties consented to this land exchange and signed an agreement letter, but the landowner failed to submit his land title deed for amendment, so neither of the deeds was updated to reflect the land exchange (i.e., the landowner's land for an access road in exchange for the three feet of church land along the roadside). This discrepancy is the source of the misunderstanding that led to an ugly dispute between the current landowners and the church.

In 2015, we were told that the ownership of the neighboring property had passed to the former landowner's niece and her husband. During that year, the new landowners tried repeatedly to sell the entire property to Papar TJC. Because the government had requisitioned this piece of land for future road expansion, the church naturally declined the option to purchase it. At this point, the new landowners started to resort to unscrupulous means to pressure



the church. They used the unrevised land title deeds to accuse the church of unlawful use of their land—the access road. On a few occasions, they even entered the church after Sabbath worship to openly threaten the members. They demanded that the church either buy the land, or pay thirty-six years' worth of back rent for using the disputed land as an access road.

WAITING FOR GOD'S INTERVENTION

In January 2016, the dispute intensified. The current landowners dumped a heap of rubble on the road, blocking the main entrance to the church and preventing our members' cars from accessing the parking area. Sister Rukina Logidu, the General Affairs Officer, quickly organized the removal of the obstruction. But, shortly after, the landowners repeated their action, and even threatened to build a row of toilets on the disputed land!

The church reported these incidents to the police, but the police did not deem them to be criminal in nature. They referred our brethren to the State Government's Land and Survey Department (LSD) to resolve the matter. After the complaint was lodged, the LSD needed time to retrieve the relevant documents from state archives. The waiting period was agonizing. Members came for church services every Friday and Saturday fearing the landowners' harassment. Some even chose to attend Sabbath services at other nearby TJC's. Apart from frequent follow-ups with the LSD, the members had nowhere else to turn, so they resolved to rely on God. With weekly fasting prayers, they implored God to open a way for them.

During those four months, the members felt as though they were walking through a dreadful wilderness, under the scorching heat of the sun, beset by dangers all around. They had to tread carefully, guarding against the ambush of the evil one. As the resident preacher, I continued to comfort the members with the word of God, and encouraged them to trust in the Lord—to pray that He would stretch out His almighty hand and perform a great work, inspiring awe in all who heard about it (1 Sam 3:11).

THE AMAZING INTERVENTION OF GOD

On 1 April 2016, the landowners blocked off the access road to the church with an iron chain. By this point, the Executive Committee of the Sabah General Assembly (Sabah GA) had become very concerned, so they also began to petition the LSD for help. On 8 April, an LSD officer verbally confirmed that the disputed piece of land—the access road—indeed belonged to the TJC, and that the neighboring landowners had encroached onto the church's property. The church could simply remove the iron chain. But in doing so, we ignited the spark that led to the final confrontation.

At 4 pm that same day, I arrived at church to find the male landowner waiting in a rage. He warned us that he had ordered a truckload of debris to block the road again—cars parked on the church compound would be trapped if their owners

did not leave immediately. On hearing this, I decided to wait and see what would happen. A Papar church member, Brother Janik, and I contacted the members to pray for the matter, and then we left the scene to have dinner in town.

At 6 pm, we returned to find the church signboard torn down and discarded on the road; it was being run over by passing vehicles. A lamp by the fence was also smashed. The landowners' car was blocking the church entrance, and both husband and wife were there, together with a burly man with long hair and a beard. Not wanting to aggravate the situation, we contacted the police and waited for them in the car. But when the police arrived, the wife viciously slandered the church using offensive language, and refused to give way.

One of the police officers reminded me to take a photo of the damaged signboard, but a strange thing happened when I tried to do so—my smartphone was unable to focus to take the photo. I tried again with Brother Janik's phone, but his phone also could not work. When the same thing happened with a third phone, I somehow realized that this must be the interference of the evil one. I shouted out, "In the name of the Lord Jesus," and finally managed to take the photo.

At that very moment, the wife let out a painful scream and sat down on the ground. One of the police officers remarked that she was

“During those four months, the members felt as though they were walking through a dreadful wilderness, under the scorching heat of the sun, beset by dangers all around.”



Clockwise from top left: Access road to church blocked by iron chain; broken lamp, access road blocked by rubble; True Jesus Church in Papar.

pretending. But I replied, “It is our God who has started to work.”

Immediately after I said this, the wife fell unconscious. The husband and his companion rushed her to the hospital, but before he left, the landowner fixed me with an angry stare. He stretched out his hand and warned, “If anything happens to my wife, you are finished!”

Having witnessed all of this, the police officers advised the church to file a report against the landowners’ intimidation and vandalism of church property—this was now a criminal case.

At 8 pm, I led the congregation in a special prayer service to thank God for His preservation, and to petition God for His continuous care. After the service, a sister nervously informed me that the landowner had returned. As I walked down the stairs, a group of church youths reported in panic that the landowner was threatening to torch

Brother Janik’s car if I did not come down.

I arrived at the church car park to find the landowner screaming out of his mind, along with his companion. He had evidently been drinking—the members later found seven empty beer cans at the entrance. He pointed at me furiously and shouted, “My wife is in the hospital, and it’s your fault!”

I replied, “I didn’t do anything to your wife. Please calm down; we can discuss and try to find a solution.”

“There’s nothing to discuss—just

buy the piece of land and the problem will be solved!”

I remained calm, saying, “If you are able to produce evidence that the road belongs to you, then the church will happily pay a reasonable compensation.”

Without another word, the landowner turned to walk five steps to his car, and picked something up. In the dim light, I could not make out what was in his hand. But in the split second that he raised it, I saw that he was holding a wooden stick. With the close proximity and force of the strike, it was impossible to escape, so I shouted, “Hallelujah!” The members looking on also shouted, “Hallelujah!”

In that instant, the landowner’s arm froze as though it had been stopped by a powerful force. He could not move forward at all. He then lowered the stick and shouted, “Amen! Amen! I’m a Roman Catholic believer!” He appeared extremely frightened. His companion helped him to his car. But before they left, he threatened to return to burn down the church. That night, four brothers and I guarded the church until morning.

The next day, we learned that the landowner had gone to the police station after leaving the church to file a report. But he was still in such shock that he could not speak.

“With the close proximity and force of the strike, it was impossible to escape, so I shouted, “Hallelujah!” The members looking on also shouted, “Hallelujah!” In that instant, the landowner’s arm froze as though it had been stopped by a powerful force.”

“Despite months of persecution and provocation, the members did not resort to retaliation. They entrusted the matter to God, who protected them from violence and exposed the landowners’ misconduct.”

After waiting for some time, the police officer advised him to return home to calm down before making a report. When he returned the next day to file the report, he said that the minister of the TJC used witchcraft to harm his wife. Of course, the police did not entertain such an irrational accusation.

GOD FINALLY OPENED A WAY

On 27 April, we received good news from the Sabah GA. They had found the signed agreement letter in their documents archive, and passed it to Deacon Agur of Papar TJC. Relevant documents were then submitted to the LSD to confirm that the land actually belonged to the church, and to request a letter of confirmation be sent to the current landowners of the neighboring property as soon as possible.

On 3 May, the LSD issued a formal letter to the landowners, and sent a duplicate to the church, verifying that the access road indeed belongs to the True Jesus Church, and that the landowners are forbidden from blocking the road. On 28 May, we received news that the female landowner was still in a coma and had been transferred to Kota Kinabalu Central Hospital. Since then, the church has not encountered any further harassment.

Thank God for His constant presence with His church in Papar. Despite months of persecution and provocation, the members did

not resort to retaliation. Instead, they responded with resilience, clearing away each obstacle and doing all things according to the law. Above all, they entrusted the matter to God, who protected them from violence and exposed the landowners’ misconduct. By God’s hand, they came through this crisis peacefully. No matter what persecution and tribulation faced by His church, God is in control; He will execute judgment at the right time, and bring comfort to those who suffer for righteousness’ sake (1 Pet 3:14).

[Your patience and faith in all the persecutions you endure are] manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels. (2 Thess 1:5–7)

May all glory and praise be unto our heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, whose peace and grace are always upon the believers in His church. Amen.

John Vun
Penampang, Sabah, Malaysia

God's Unfailing Grace in a Troubled Land: Reflections on the Mindanao Ministry

INTRODUCTION

If we were to search for the term “conflicts in Mindanao” on the internet, we would find a long list of groups made up of government-backed separatist rebels and religious extremist militants. These include the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and pro-Islamic State groups such as Abu Sayyaf. And as we read on, we would discover the constant threat of violence faced by the inhabitants of Mindanao (the main island in the southern region of the Philippines). Recent acts of terror include the beheading

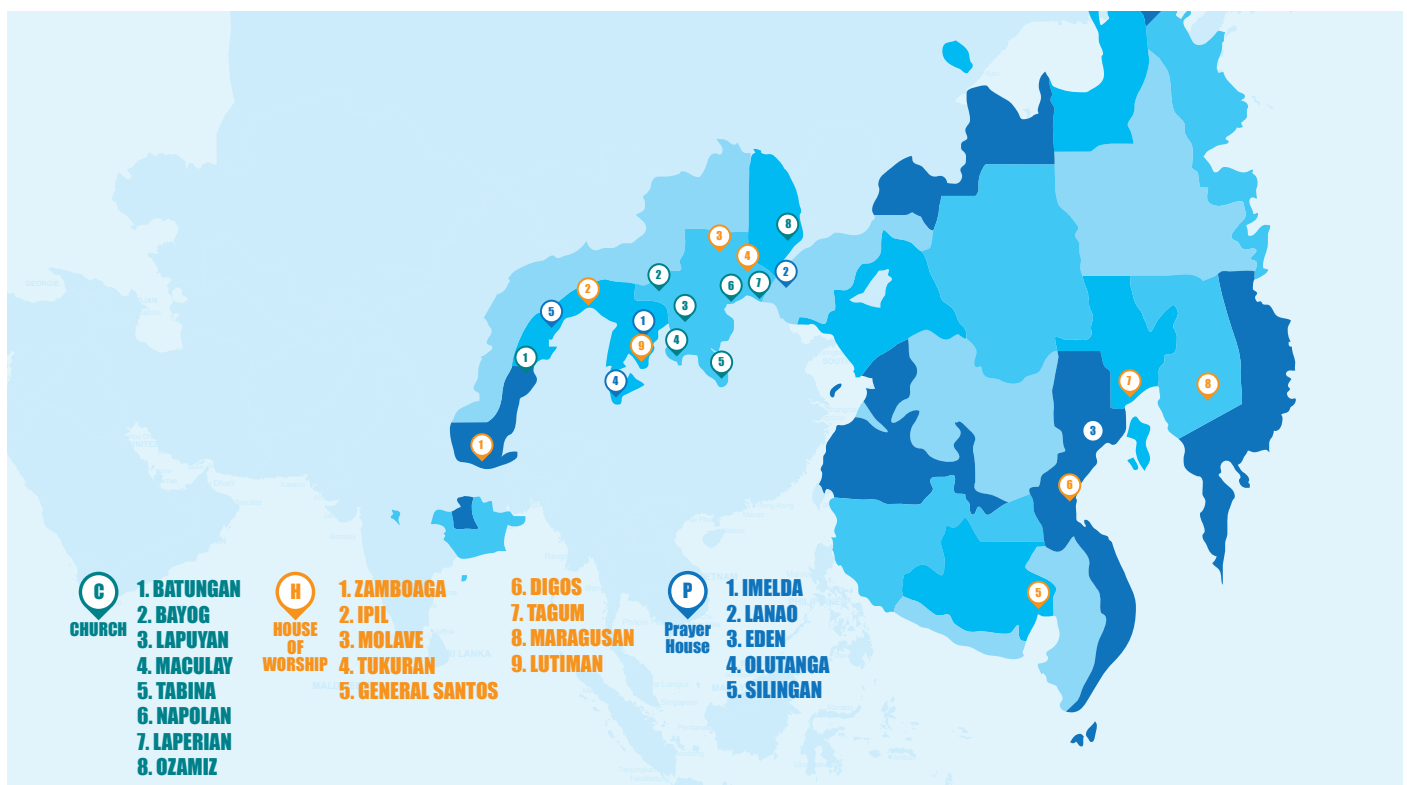
of a foreign hostage by Abu Sayyaf militants,¹ and the Islamic State beheading of a police chief and slaughter of at least another twenty people in a retaliatory rampage across Marawi.² What goes through our mind when we read a news report of such lawlessness? No doubt we see it as just another incident from some remote island

far removed from our everyday lives, and nothing to do with us. But do you know that God has reached out to the local populace on this troubled island, and that a group of His people, our brethren, lives there?

When we discuss the ministry in the Philippines, we usually focus on the church in Manila on the northern island of Luzon, or on the True Jesus Church training centre at Mansilingan in the Western Visayas of the Philippines. For many years, overseas workers sent by the

1 Kathy Quiano, Nadine Schmidt and Angela Dewan, “German hostage beheaded by Abu Sayyaf militants in Philippines,” *CNN*, February 28, 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/02/27/asia/philippines-german-behead-abu-sayyaf/index.html>.

2 “IS behead police and kill 20 in Philippines,” *Sky News*, May 25, 2017, <http://www.skynews.com.au/news/world/asiapacific/2017/05/25/is-behead-police-and-kill-20-in-philippines.html>.



Locations of the True Jesus Church on Mindanao, Philippines.

South East Asia Evangelical Center (SEAC) and, from 1995 onwards, by the Philippines Mission Committee (PMC) under the Sabah General Assembly, have centered their work on these politically more stable areas.

Yet, it is in the southern island of Mindanao where the majority of our brethren resides. The PMC has faced many challenges when sending workers there, as the threat of kidnapping and killing of foreigners remains high. Since the early 2000s, the situation in Mindanao has been very tense due to bombings, kidnappings and the killing of Christian hostages. For security reasons, the PMC has had to make several painful decisions to cancel training courses for religious education teachers and youth short-term theological courses over the years.

Mindanao Island is the second largest in the Philippines, with a land mass of 40,360 square miles. There are currently eight churches, five prayer houses and nine places of worship, with a total of 1,132 members. Because of how widely dispersed the places of worship are, the Mindanao ministry is divided into four administrative zones, and three deacons have been engaged to strengthen the pulpit ministry and pastor the flock.

FIRST SEEDS

The SEAC made a series of missionary trips to the Philippines



between 1985 and 1992 to pastor and evangelize in the Philippines. Some notable events are as follows:

- In 1986, a pioneering trip was made to Mindanao Island to proclaim the gospel of salvation. Twelve adults and eight children in Digos, Davao Del Sur, Mindanao accepted the gospel and received water baptism on June 21, 1986. The first person who was baptized, Constancia Abueva, saw a vision of glorious bright light, and was filled with great joy. Praise the Lord, the true church had reached the Southern Philippines.

- On March 20, 1987, during one of the missionary trips to Mindanao, another sixteen observers were convinced by the truth preached by the true church and accepted water baptism. The Prayer House administration was organized to pastor the flock.

- In the same year, three United Pentecostal Church (UPC) pastors visited the True Jesus Church in Mansilingan. After much discussion and deliberation, one of them accepted the truth and was baptized. When he returned home to Pagadian City on Mindanao, he shared the newfound truth to his UPC congregation. Many of his close friends and relatives believed and converted into the True Jesus Church. This is what led to the establishment of the church in Pagadian on July 11, 1987.

THE GOSPEL SPREADS

Despite threats from armed rebels that restricted foreign missionaries from coming to Mindanao, the gospel truth proliferated in Mindanao by other means:

Live Radio Evangelism: This radio show, initiated by a local worker, was broadcast for thirty minutes every week. Between 1991 and 1997, the weekly True Jesus Church Pagadian radio program served the remote rural populations of Zamboanga Del Sur and Lanao Del Norte. Many devout Christians of other denominations would travel

“ Do you know that God has reached out to the local populace on this troubled island, and that a group of His people, our brethren, lives there? ”



Clockwise from top left: True Jesus Church in Napolan, Eden, Bantungan and Bayog.

to the church in Pagadian to study the doctrines of the true church. The churches in Maculay, Laperian and Tabina were established through radio evangelism.

Literary Ministry: Many truth-seekers came to know the truth through the *Words of Life* pamphlets published by True Jesus Church, and were baptized by SEAC and IA missionary workers.

In this troubled land, the Lord's grace never failed. During the ninth missionary trip to Mindanao, from May 1 to 13, 1991, when workers were sent to pastor the churches in Pagadian and Lanao, thirty-three people were baptized. One of these was a lady who had been suffering from a post-natal neurological complication which caused paralysis in both legs. She was baptized on May 9, after being transported to the site by a bullock cart. Miraculously, by the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ, she was able to walk after her baptism.

The work continued throughout the 1990s with church workers carrying out the evangelism and pastoral work in northern Zamboanga Del Sur. Two additional prayer houses were established, at Lingatan, in 1994, and Bayog, in 1996.

The True Jesus Church continued to grow in Mindanao between 2002 and 2006, with prayer houses being established at Ipil, Silingan, Bukong, Tukuran and Cagayan De Oro.

THE STORMS

As the church grows, the devil will also work in the attempt to hinder such growth. The churches in the Southern Philippines experienced one of their earliest storms in the form of deviant teachings by the first preacher ordained in Mindanao, who was subsequently dismissed from his position. During this time, the church in Pagadian and the SEAC-funded religious education classrooms and missionary quarters, costing MYR 35,655.20 (around US \$9,389 at the time), were

under the control of this preacher, and church members were locked out from attending church services.

One local minister, supported by overseas preachers sent by the PMC, stood up to defend the truth and the basic beliefs of the true church, encouraging the members to stand firm in their faith. For one year, eighty members congregated at the house of this minister's mother. They were constantly reminded to hold fast to the truth (Jn 8:32) and reject false teachings (Gal 1:8-9). They also prayed for God to provide them a new place of worship. Their prayers were answered by a dream and a vision.

The wife of this local minister dreamed of two ships. The first ship was boarded by the ex-preacher and his family, and it was old and dilapidated, sailing on murky waters. The second ship, which carried the church members, was big and new.

Later, the minister's wife also had a vision during a prayer service. She saw the church members in a large, new building, with a True Jesus Church signboard on the front.

Indeed, the Lord provides (Gen 22:14). God guided an ex-UPC pastor to accept the true doctrine of salvation. He was baptized on February 17, 2005, and received the Holy Spirit. Later, his partially completed chapel was sold to the True Jesus Church. The Lord had indeed answered the prayers of the Pagadian members, and provided them a new place of worship at Napolan.

CHALLENGES

On top of the political unrest, our Filipino brethren in Mindanao also face other difficulties. Some

SOME STATISTICS

Zone	Churches	Prayer houses	House services	Members	Ministers	Preachers	Trainee Preachers	RE Classes	Students
1. Mindanao Del Sur	7	-	3	820	6	1	2	11	149
2. Lanao Del Norte	-	2	-	57	-	-	-	-	-
3. Zambonga Sibugay	1	3	2	166	4	1	-	3	25
4. Davao	-	1	4	89	1	-	-	1	7

of these are shared here so that, with the spirit of unity in Christ, we can help to carry their burdens in prayer and extend our love through other means, if God gives us the opportunity to do so.

Church Leadership: Because the pastoral work is heavily dependent on only two preachers, the church growth has been slow. The PMC is now focused on training the core local church workers in active pastoring, youth spiritual development, and the expansion of systematic religious education. Strengthening these areas is vital in laying a firm foundation for sustainable church growth.

Poverty: The Gross National Income of the Philippines per capita is US \$3,580 (2016),³ and the poverty rate is 21.6 per cent (2015).⁴ With an under-employment⁵ rate of 16.1 per cent (in April 2017),⁶

poverty remains a critical problem in the country, and the problem is worse on Mindanao. These factors have resulted in the migration of working parents and youths to larger commercial centers, such as Cebu and Manila, or overseas to the Middle East in search of higher wages to support their families. Understandably, many aspire to lift their families from the vicious cycle of poverty.

Lack of Manpower: The greatest consequence of urban migration (as mentioned above) is the dwindling manpower in local churches and prayer houses. This affects the momentum and implementation of the holy work in Mindanao.

Lack of Financial Self-sufficiency: Most of the members are either farmers or fishermen, so the offerings received by the church to support the ministry are still lacking. The PMC has embarked on training the local church treasurers in how to manage the financial administration of the church, in order to gain the confidence of the members. In addition to this, tithe offerings by faith (Mal 3:8–10) need to be emphasized in the pulpit ministry.

CONCLUSION

We thank the Lord Jesus for His amazing grace over the past thirty-four years, for the growth and preservation of the church in such a challenging environment. The selfless servitude of the early missionary workers, in caring for the spiritual welfare of the Mindanao members, is worthy of our emulation.

For those of us living in politically and economically stable countries, let us remember our brethren in the Philippines, as well as countless other countries, where there is civil unrest and uncertainty. The next time we read of kidnappings, conflict and killings in the Southern Philippines, spare a thought and a prayer for our brethren living there. May the Lord Jesus continue to strengthen the faith and love of the members in Mindanao.

3 "Philippines," The World Bank Data, accessed September 21, 2017, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/philippines>.

4 "Farmers, Fishermen and Children consistently posted the highest poverty incidence among basic sectors," Philippine Statistics Authority, accessed September 21, 2017, <https://psa.gov.ph/poverty-press-releases>.

5 The rate at which the labor force are employed for fewer hours than they desire or need.

6 "Labor and Employment," Philippine Statistics Authority, accessed September 21, 2017, <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/survey/labor-force>.

My Journey of Serving the Lord

A BOY'S SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

I grew up in the church at Kulim, a town in the state of Kedah in north Malaysia. Back then, we had no deacons or sermon speakers, so deacons from other churches in the state would be sent to Kulim to conduct services. Every Sabbath, my family would travel an hour by bus to church. But there were times when—after a long wait—we would find out that the assigned deacon could not make it. In those instances, we would simply pray together and then go home. If no one turned up within half an hour, then it was likely that there would be no service that week. Seeing this state of affairs, I told myself that,

“I pleaded with the Lord Jesus, “O Lord, please give me the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, there is no way I can become a preacher to pastor Your flock.” ”

when I finished my studies, I would become a preacher to help deliver sermons and pastor the flock of God.

When I was around fifteen, in my third year of high school, I attended a spiritual meeting. At this meeting, Elder John Yang from Taiwan spoke on the judgment of the last day from the Book of Revelation. His sermons really stirred us and made us realize how close the day of the Lord was. We suddenly felt the

urgency to receive the Holy Spirit, otherwise we would not be able to enter the kingdom of God. We prayed earnestly during the many prayer sessions, and by the final session, I was the only one who had not received the Holy Spirit.

Receiving the Holy Spirit

During the final prayer session dedicated to praying for the Holy Spirit, everyone was interceding for me. I was very touched, despite my



anxiety, to hear their pleas on my behalf. However, after a while, my sense of urgency decreased when I realized that the last day would not come immediately and I would still have time to pray for the Holy Spirit. Then, it occurred to me that without the Holy Spirit, I would not be accepted to train as a full-time preacher. My anxiety levels rose again because I really wanted to pastor the church. I pleaded with the Lord Jesus, “O Lord, please give me the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, there is no way I can become a preacher to pastor Your flock.”

As I prayed in this manner, suddenly, a deep sorrow welled up within me. The Lord’s words came to mind, “Are you willing to suffer as a preacher?” In those days, a preacher’s life was a hard one. As the believers were very poor, the church could not afford to pay the preachers much. In addition, not all church leaders supported the idea of having full-time evangelists. Because all church workers in Malaysia at that time were volunteers who served the church in their spare time, they could not understand why a preacher could not do the same.

Even so, I told the Lord that I was willing. I wanted to pastor the flock of God. I was afraid of neither difficulties nor poverty. I was then moved by the Holy Spirit. I cried so hard that I could not pray properly. When that prayer ended, my friends beside me were certain I had received the Holy Spirit. They had heard me speaking in tongues, but I could not be sure because I had been crying during the prayer.

In the next prayer, all my doubts disappeared when I clearly spoke in tongues. I was joyful but, at the

same time, I felt some stress. Since God had granted me the Holy Spirit, I had to fulfill my part by offering myself for full-time ministry. Ahead of me would be poverty and the opposition of those who did not believe in having full-time preachers.

A YOUTH’S PREPARATION AND CRISES

Sermon Speaking and Religious Education

Returning home after the spiritual meeting, I changed my aim in life. I no longer focused solely on my studies and the pursuit of wealth. In order to equip myself to be a preacher, I consistently read the Bible and church publications. In order to practice sermon speaking, I started a nightly family service. I made my younger siblings sit and listen to me speak. My parents were also supportive and would often attend the service. At the same time, I took the initiative to start religious education classes at home, roping in my siblings and cousins to be my students.

Loss of Motivation

That was how I started preparing myself, but such fervor did not last. My enthusiasm gradually waned because I had no one to encourage and guide me. Those little ones came to listen to me only because I forced them to, so I felt less and less motivated to speak. As my faith grew colder, I returned to my old ambitions—to do well in my studies, to graduate, to work, and to escape

poverty. After I had established myself, then I would think about how to help the church.

My mother saw the change in me and thus gently reminded me, saying, “It has been some time since we had a family service.” We still held a nightly service, but we would just pray—there was no more hymn singing or sermon speaking. My mother added, “Do you realize that your prayer is different from the past? Is there something wrong?” Although I knew clearly what was wrong, I did not reply.

A Warning Vision

One night, I was very tired so I decided to have an early night. As it was only 7 pm, my mother asked through my closed bedroom door if I was sick. Before I could reply, I heard a frightening cry, like from a horror movie. I tried to open my eyes and get up, but I could not do either. I have had nightmares before in which I could not move, but after some time, I would wake up and realize it was a dream. This experience was different. I had just lay on the bed, and was not yet asleep. I heard my mother clearly but could not answer her. Because I had not replied, she called out again—I was hoping she would come into my room, but instead, she just remained outside, grumbling to herself.

The terrifying voice grew louder and sounded like it was approaching me. I felt like I was being dragged out of bed, and I fainted from the shock.

“I told the Lord that I was willing. I wanted to pastor the flock of God. I was afraid of neither difficulties nor poverty. I was then moved by the Holy Spirit.”

When I regained consciousness, I found myself walking down a dark road, or rather, being dragged along it. Human wails came from both sides, but it was so dark I could not even see my own fingers, let alone see who was wailing. I did not think that I had been taken to hell. Neither could it be judgment day because the Bible describes the last judgement and hell as a lake of fire, and this did not match my surroundings. So I wondered to myself, “What place is this?”

Later, I was taken to a brighter place. There was a queue, so I joined it. Facing the queue was a man clothed in black. He held a sword shaped like a fish bone. When those in the queue reached the front, other black-hooded men would drag them before this man. He would then stab them with his fish-bone sword. The scene was so vivid that I still remember it today. What was even more haunting were the cries of those who had been stabbed. They would fall to the ground, writhing and wailing, but they could not die. I knew with a sense of dread that I was going to be the last one.

By then, I was praying extremely fervently. I repented before the Lord and asked for forgiveness. I told the Lord I no longer wanted the mortarboard or wealth; I just wanted to become a preacher. As I kept praying, repenting of my sins, a light suddenly shone down. The cacophonous wailing stopped. And from the source of the light emerged melodious music, as if there was a large group of people singing; the music slowly drifted over to me. I thought, *The Lord has answered my prayers*. I waited for the Lord to save me. That anticipation caused overwhelming joy to well up

“By then, I was praying extremely fervently. I repented before the Lord and asked for forgiveness. I told the Lord I no longer wanted the mortarboard or wealth; I just wanted to become a preacher. As I kept praying, repenting of my sins, a light suddenly shone down.”

within me. I felt deeply blessed to have the Lord as my Savior—I had seen how people suffered because they did not have the Savior to save them. A cloud hovered above my head. I was so excited, thinking this would be my moment of salvation. But the cloud drifted away. I was devastated—the Lord had left me behind. In fear and sadness, I cried out, “O Lord! Save me!”

It was then that my mother ran into my room. “What happened?” she asked anxiously, “Why are you shouting?”

I replied, “Nothing happened. But let us pray.”

When I knelt down to pray, I was filled with the Holy Spirit. I felt like an abandoned baby who was suddenly saved. I was filled with joy, but a tinge of fear remained. In fact, so intense was the fear of abandonment, I can still feel it today.

As we continued to pray, I wept aloud. My prayer was so loud that my nearest neighbour, whose house was about two hundred meters away, could hear me. The following day, she asked my mother what had happened to me to make me cry so piteously. From that day onwards, we resumed our family services with sermon speaking and hymn singing. On my part, I readjusted my ambitions and direction in life.

I no longer aimed to graduate and attain great wealth; I no longer sought the material pleasures the world could offer. I just resolved to be a good preacher.

Test of Resolution

Since the minimum requirement to become a full-time preacher was a high school certificate, I planned to apply for preacher training on my graduation from high school. But when the time came, I did not register because I had found a good job in tin mining. It was easy work with a high wage. No formal qualifications were required, but it was dangerous work.¹

I was paid \$600 per month. For comparison, a primary school teacher was paid \$300 per month, and a full-time preacher started at \$60 per month. When I told my mother that I wanted to become a full-time preacher, she asked me to consider carefully. She thought that I would be better off working at my full-time secular job and helping out part-time in sermon speaking. My monthly salary was

¹ I worked as a water jet operator for a tin mining company in Ipoh, Malaysia. High-pressure water jets (known as monitors) were aimed at ore-bearing cliffs to break the earth up. The resultant slurry (mud) would be washed into the pit. The tin ore could then be separated from the earth by panning, or by a gravel pump used to pump the material up a huge wooden sluice box to trap the tin ore. The job was dangerous because the pit would grow increasingly steep, causing mudslides that could trap and kill the miners.

a huge contribution to our family finances. However, my mother left the decision to me.

I thus told the Lord Jesus that, because my siblings were still young, I wanted to work for a few years to support my family before becoming a full-time preacher. Moreover, the concept of a full-time preacher employed by the church was still not well accepted. I told myself that perhaps the time was not right yet, and I continued in my secular career.

A PREACHER'S CALL AND TESTING

Motivation

One day at work, I heard a sheep bleating. I wondered who would rear sheep in such a deep pit; perhaps a lost sheep had wandered to our mine. I worked in the engine room and was in charge of switching on (or off) the water supply for the monitor pump when instructed. Hearing the sheep's bleating, I stood up and left the engine room to take a look. To my surprise, I saw a sheep right in front of me. But when

I looked again, it was gone. I could still hear bleating, so I took another careful look in case it had run off at my approach. The sound was very clear—a continuous and pitiful cry—and I felt a deep sorrow. I even went out to the top of the hill (where the engine room was located) in case the sheep had wandered there. But I found no sheep.

Suddenly, I felt a pain in my heart. It seemed as if someone was singing the hymn, *The Ninety and Nine*,² within me. The first verse goes:

*There were ninety and nine that
safely lay in the shelter of the fold.
But one was out on the hills away far
off from the gates of gold.
Away on the mountains wild
and bare, away from the
tender shepherd's care...*

2 By Elizabeth C. Clephane (1830–1869).

The voice within me kept echoing, “Away on the mountains wild and bare.”

I understood. In order to help my family, I had delayed applying to train as a preacher. However, in the house of God, there were many who needed pastoring. I had only thought of my own family, I had not considered the house of God. My family was poor, but no one had yet lost their physical or spiritual lives. In the house of God, many sheep had already gone astray. If there were no shepherd to pastor them, they would sin and die spiritually.

At that point, I resolved to join the ministry. My colleagues and my boss asked why I suddenly quit when I was doing well at work. They were anxious to retain me because few youths were willing to work so far from the city, in a quiet

“ I had only thought of my own family, I had not considered the house of God. My family was poor, but no one had yet lost their physical or spiritual lives. ”



“From that time onwards, I no longer grumbled; I only hoped for the Lord’s will to be fulfilled. That period was a great trial for me, but the Lord helped me again and again. His love and comfort enabled me to persevere to the very end.”

place with nothing much to do. They initially thought I had found a lucrative job, but when I told them I was quitting my \$600-per-month job to earn \$60, they laughed and asked whether I was mad. I assured them I was not.

Application

In 1972, at the age of nineteen, I lodged my application to be a trainee preacher with my home church of Kulim. This was accepted at a meeting of Malaysia’s northern region churches. They decided that I should shadow and learn from the deacons as they went about their pastoral work. The General Assembly (GA) of West Malaysia and Singapore would discuss my application at the annual year-end delegates conference. In the meantime, I was sent to different towns to deliver sermons.

By the end of 1972, at the Annual Delegates Conference, the meeting attendees could not reach a consensus over my application. Church leaders who had opposed the church’s employment of full-time preachers continued to oppose the approval of my application. However, some supported my application. Finally, two elderly ministers suggested, “Why don’t we allow him to work in the West Malaysia and Singapore churches for two years? For one thing, it will allow us to get to know him better. And for another, it will be a test of

his resolve, so we can judge whether he is suitable to be a preacher.”

Acceptance

Hence, in 1973, I was officially appointed to minister the churches in West Malaysia and Singapore. A year later, my application to train as a full-time preacher was accepted at another GA meeting; my original probation of two years was effectively cut to one. In 1974, I was sent to Taiwan to attend the theological course.

I was the first church-funded preacher from West Malaysia to participate in the theological course. It was also the first time the Malaysian churches had started training a full-time preacher. Two sisters from Malaysia had gone to Taiwan to participate in the theological course a few years before. However, both of them were self-funded.³

Challenge

It was not easy to be the first theological student in Malaysia because of the church’s financial situation. A trainee preacher had to be prepared to suffer financially and even psychologically. For instance, I was regularly asked why an able-bodied youth like myself could not make his own living—was I not ashamed to depend on the church’s

support? Some questioned whether I took up full-time ministry because I could not further my studies.

My wife and I had to suffer these hardships but neither of us regret my service as a preacher. Although we faced opposition and disdain, the Lord never spurned our offering.

The Lord’s Abidance through Dark Valleys

There were many occasions when I was discouraged and wanted to give up. I did not want my wife to have to suffer this unfair treatment, so, at one point, I decided to leave the full-time ministry. I knew that this would disappoint the Lord because He had guided and helped me all along the way. But by then, I had had enough. I asked the Lord to forgive my decision. Although I felt guilty, I really could not imagine having to suffer these hardships for the rest of my life.

As all these thoughts were running through my mind during prayer, the image of the Lord Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane came to mind. The words of Jesus sounded in my heart, “Can you not suffer with Me for a moment longer?” Moved by the Holy Spirit, I wept. Of course, I gave up that decision. Had the Lord not always helped me, I would have given up long ago.

There was also a time—spanning a few years—when I went through an especially difficult time. My sister was suffering the last stage of cancer, and her pain was so excruciating she would cry out loud. It broke my heart to see her in pain. I had interceded, even with fasting, and asked the Lord to lessen her pain but apparently to no avail. Some seized that moment to criticize me. At that time, the International

³ In fact, in those days, the church did not allow sisters to speak on the pulpit. If there were no brothers to interpret, the sisters had to interpret from below the pulpit.

Assembly of the True Jesus Church was grappling with the case of a preacher who had committed many misdemeanors. This preacher enjoyed a high profile and many supporters. As I had openly spoken out against his conduct, I was accused of maligning him because of my jealousy. They even cited all the grief I was suffering—my wife’s miscarriage, my father’s demise, and my sister’s painful cancer—as evidence that I was wrong to speak up against him.

It would have been easier for me to adopt a neutral, self-protective stance—to keep quiet and allow this (now) ex-preacher to continue speaking sermons and conducting Holy Communion. But as a servant of the church, it was my responsibility to take care of the church. So I spoke out. Yet in trying to do the right thing, I was seen as the wrongdoer. It was indeed suffering upon suffering.

Honestly, I did not know what to tell the Lord during prayer. I could not cease praying but I literally did not know how to pray. Often, I just knelt there in silence, almost as if I were giving the Lord the cold shoulder. But I was not—I simply did not know what else to do or say. I continued to kneel before Him because He was the only One I could rely on. In my grief, I finally grumbled to Him, “Why should I suffer these things? Have I not suffered enough? You have not helped me!”

“The Lord will guide all of us through all the tomorrows He has prepared for us. I was willing to put my hand into the Lord’s nail-scarred hands and let Him lead. Are you willing?”



Preacher Aun Quek Chin (left).

Suddenly, the image of the Lord nailed on the cross appeared before me. I saw people taking something to the Lord, but He did not accept it. The Bible records that after they crucified the Lord Jesus, the Roman soldiers gave Him vinegar mixed with myrrh. This mixture was intended to reduce His physical agony on the cross—an act of compassion from the soldiers. But the Lord refused because He had to suffer on our behalf.

My sister could reduce her pain by increasing her dosage of painkillers. But she knew that this came at the cost of shortening her life further, so she just endured the pain. My vision helped me explain to my sister, “This is the suffering that our Lord wants us to go through. During His crucifixion, He could have reduced His pain, but He did not do so, for our sakes. If we are suffering today, and there is nothing to stop us from relieving our suffering, then we should thank the Lord.”

From that time onwards, I no longer grumbled; I only hoped for the Lord’s will to be fulfilled. That period was a great trial for me, but the Lord helped me again and again. His love and comfort enabled me to persevere to the very end.

A RETIRED PREACHER’S GRATITUDE FOR GRACE

When I look back and see how I was able to last until the end of my official tenure as a full-time minister, I can see God’s preservation and God’s grace. I offered up my youth for the Lord, but He allowed me to enjoy the latter years of my life with my wife. Throughout these many years, I have indeed experienced much of God’s grace. It is the Lord who led us personally through those difficult days.

Today, in my retirement, God has given me a more peaceful life. I may not know what tomorrow will bring but I know that the Lord will be there to guide me. The Lord will guide all of us through all the tomorrows He has prepared for us. I was willing to put my hand into the Lord’s nail-scarred hands, and let Him lead. Are you willing?

Adapted from lectures
by Steven Shek
Edinburgh, UK

Marching to Zion

Editor's note: This article is based on a series of lectures given to youths at the National Youth Fellowship in Newcastle, UK, from September 30 to October 2, 2016.

“Whether we gain entry into heaven depends on the way we live our lives, which, in turn, depends on our value system.”

In 2017, the True Jesus Church is one hundred years old. Over the past century, the church has been marching to Zion, for Zion is where she will receive salvation (Ps 14:7). But the journey is not yet over. It is the will of God that we continue marching onward (Eph 4:1–6, 13).

The ancient saints would journey to the physical Zion—the city of Jerusalem—three times a year, because they knew that those who dwell in God's house are blessed. For this reason, they called the house of God “lovely” (Ps 84:1–4).

We would be similarly motivated in our onward journey if we knew what God has prepared for us in the future—entry into the kingdom of heaven. However, whether we gain entry into heaven depends on the way we live our lives, which, in turn, depends on our value system. The twenty-first-century world is a world of advanced technology and convenience, but it is also a world that assails us with values contrary to God's word. Therefore, we have to strive to remain on the right path.

The apostle Paul's famous cry of victory was that he had fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith (2 Tim 4:7). The good athlete not only runs fast, he must also finish the race. Similarly, the good soldier not only marches with perseverance, he marches right till the end.

PIECE TOGETHER A FRAGMENTED TRUTH

The church in the time of the apostles started on the right path, since she



National Youth Fellowship 2016, Newcastle, UK.

received the complete truth from Jesus. However, after a few decades, as heresies crept in, the Holy Spirit departed from the church. Without the Spirit's guidance, the truth became fragmented and the church eventually splintered into many denominations. But then the Holy Spirit descended in 1917 to once again unify and piece together the fragmented truth.

The early workers of the revived church had the complete truth. But the future of the church depends on the systematic transmission of this complete truth from one generation to the next. The failure to do this—whether as a church or individually—will mean that the truth will again fragment.

With regard to our personal faith, imagine it as a jigsaw puzzle. When we are young, our faith may only consist of four pieces, and these are easily assembled. But as we grow and listen to the word of God, we realize there are actually more pieces to the puzzle, and this will take us much more time to piece together. To complete a jigsaw puzzle, we usually begin with the corners and edges—building the frame—before filling in the middle, all the while constantly referring to a photo of the finished puzzle. This task takes time and there is no short cut. Similarly, when we try to build our faith and knowledge of the truth, we must first put the frame in place. This frame may comprise key components of the truth such as the church's ten articles of faith, the five essential doctrines, the Ten Commandments, and so on. We build on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone (Eph 2:20). Next, we fit in the other pieces—a deeper knowledge and

“Like those thousand-piece jigsaw puzzles, building up our personal faith may occasionally be difficult, if not downright frustrating. ... The solution lies with God and the guidance of His Spirit. On our part, we have to persevere and complete the puzzle piece by piece.”

the application of His teachings—while looking at the pattern of sound words (2 Tim 1:13).

Like those thousand-piece jigsaw puzzles, building up our personal faith may occasionally be difficult, if not downright frustrating. At such moments, we may even doubt that the puzzle can be completed. The solution lies with God and the guidance of His Spirit. On our part, we have to persevere and complete the puzzle piece by piece, even though there may be times when we lose interest or are distracted by other pleasures (2 Tim 3:1–5).

KEEP OUR HEART LOYAL TO GOD

On their pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the ancient saints felt in their hearts that it was far better to be in the courts of God (Ps 84:10). If, on our own journey to Zion, we do not have this same heart of delight for God, then we must ask ourselves whether our heart is still loyal to God or whether it has been affected by sin.

As members of the true church, redeemed by the blood of Christ, we have been made kings and priests to God (Rev 5:9–10), with Christ as our Sovereign. How can we be kings with a heart for God? We can learn from two young kings in the Old Testament: Joash and Josiah.

Joash's Heart of Persistence

Joash became king at the tender age of seven, and set his heart on repairing the house of God (2 Chr 24:4). At the time, God's people had turned to worshipping idols, leaving the holy temple in a ruined state. This young man resolved to bring the people back to God.

King Joash did not do this work alone; he gathered the priests and Levites, and despatched them to collect money for temple repairs and maintenance. However, the Levites were slow to act, thinking it would be too difficult a task, or even impossible. Yet the king did not give up, nor was he disheartened. Instead, he encouraged the chief priest Jehoiada and the Levites, insisting that this work had to be done, because it was the will of God. They placed a chest at the gate of the house of the Lord and, to the priests' surprise, the people rejoiced and filled the chest day after day. This was how they managed to restore the temple to its original condition (2 Chr 24:13).

King Joash's loyal heart towards God and spiritual perseverance resulted in the restoration of God's temple. Burnt offerings were once again offered to God. We should have the heart of Joash, desiring and working towards a church full of heart and spirit for God. Moreover, we need to have the same heart of perseverance

“If we find we do not care for the truth—i.e., we are not interested in deepening our knowledge of it or defending it—it may be because our hearts have already been captured by the world.”

in all spiritual matters, even when our minds tell us it is too difficult or downright impossible.

Josiah's Faithful Pursuit of God

King Josiah started his reign at eight years old, and he did what was right in the eyes of God—he did not deviate to the left or to the right (2 Chr 34:2). He sought God at a young age and began to purge the idols from his kingdom at the age of twenty. Later, Hilkiah the high priest found the Book of the Law and Shaphan the scribe read it before the king. When Josiah realized that God was angry at the people's iniquities, he tore his clothes (2 Chr 34:19–21). With this enhanced understanding, King Josiah made a covenant to follow the Lord and to keep His commandments with all his heart and soul. He also made the people of Jerusalem and the tribe of Benjamin take a stand (2 Chr 34:31–32).

Just as Josiah sought after God from a young age and purged idols from his kingdom, we too must pursue God's word and remove falsehoods from our lives. By enhancing our own understanding of how to please God, like Josiah, we will know the state of our faith and be better equipped to piece it together.

King Joash and King Josiah both implemented changes in their kingdom to please God. Josiah also took steps to ensure that he and his citizens did not become complacent (2 Chr 34:33). Do we constantly think

of ways to help our brethren build rapport, and become more pleasing to God (cf. Col 1:28)?

AVOID THE BIGGEST THREAT: COMPLACENCY

The people of Israel and Judah were often complacent, believing that they would always have peace and security. But in fact, they regularly incurred God's wrath through their actions. Even worse, they would often reject the warnings of the true prophets of God. False prophets told these people the things they wanted to hear (Jer 6:14; Ezek 13:10), which further fed their complacency. As they were not in the truth, they could not see how the warnings of God's prophets concerned them.

If we want to explain the truth, we must be in the truth and constantly desire to remain in it. For our hearts to be in the truth, we must first have a believing heart. During Christ's ministry, the Jews rejected Him and did not believe in Him. Thus, they could neither understand His teachings nor see how these concerned them. The devil prowls around, waiting for us to demonstrate the slightest doubt in God or the tiniest sliver of scepticism towards His word. He is waiting for us to listen to the word of God and ask, “So what?” It is at this point that the devil will take the truth away from our heart (Mt 14:4, 9). If we find we do not care for the truth—i.e., we are not interested in deepening our

knowledge of it or defending it—it may be because our hearts have already been captured by the world. In these circumstances, we become people who are in the world and of the world (cf. Jn 17:16). Blinded by the world's glittering pleasures, we are not able to see God's presence in our lives.

We have heard the many testimonies of God's amazing work when the Holy Spirit descended again to re-establish the true church. However, today, one hundred years after this establishment, it may be difficult for us to see God's power and consistent presence in our service, as witnessed in the early days. That is why we must renew our focus on Zion.

We must believe that we are the one true church, even though we were not present when the Holy Spirit descended to re-establish His church on earth. Jesus said to His disciple Thomas, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (Jn 20:29), and this includes us today. We must never lose faith in the fact that, both individually and collectively as a church, we belong to God and will be blessed by Him.

GALVANIZE OUR SOUL

As we continue to march towards Zion, our heavenly goal, we will encounter difficulties that can distract us from piecing together our faith and cause us to deviate from the right path. To overcome these challenges, we must have a galvanized soul.

Galvanization has two definitions: the first is to excite or to stir up into sudden activity. We often try to stir ourselves to act, but this feeling does not last long. When hardships arise

or temptations beguile, these often dampen the initial excitement; we then lose the drive to continue. If we run on adrenaline alone, we may burn out quickly, leading to unfinished tasks and feelings of failure. Clearly, such galvanization is of little help in overcoming the difficulties we face on our journey.

But there is another type of galvanization: the application of a protective layer to prevent rust and corrosion in metal. It is dipped into a hot solution to obtain this protective layer. Similarly, we were dipped into the blood of Christ during baptism. Additionally, we have to apply the truth and His teachings to our daily lives. In other words, it is our faith and the truth that will protect our hearts, minds and souls against the corrosive influences of the world. Over time, it is possible for this protective coating to be scratched, thus allowing corroding elements to reach the soul beneath. That is why it is important to be in constant contact with God, to keep the protective layer scratch-free.

To check whether our soul is still galvanized or whether our protective coating has worn away, we can ask ourselves three questions:

1. Are our feelings, thoughts and actions holy?
2. Are our feelings, thoughts and actions loving?
3. Are our feelings, thoughts and actions righteous?

If we can answer yes to all three, then we still have a galvanized soul. If the answer to one or more of these is no, then we need to check if we are in constant contact with God. We need to assess if we have

become complacent, and if our hearts are still loyal to God.

SEEK AND FOLLOW THE BLUEPRINT OF THE END-TIME TRUE CHURCH

All that we have faced, and will face, is part of our journey of life and faith. The generations before us were able to overcome all difficulties, and kept their faith based on the blueprint given to God's people. Not everyone can see this blueprint. Only those who truly turn their hearts to God can see the blueprint found in the Old Testament.

God instructed the prophet Ezekiel to describe the temple to the people of Israel, so that they might be ashamed of their iniquities. And only when the people were ashamed of all they had done would Ezekiel

reveal the design of the temple to them (Ezek 43:10–12). For us today, if we want to see the blueprint of the end-time true church, we need to be prepared to confess our iniquities (1 Jn 1:9). When we see our own iniquities, the shame we feel will drive us to seek forgiveness and improvement through prayers to God. And when we constantly turn to Him, He protects us from the corrosion of the world and transforms us, enhancing our spirituality.

Spending more time with God will not only help us to understand ourselves better, but will also allow us to see the blueprint of the church clearly. The more we understand the design that God has for His church, the more we can help each other on this journey to Zion.

“It may be difficult for us to see God’s power and consistent presence in our service, as witnessed in the early days. That is why we must renew our focus on Zion.”





ZION, OUR FINAL DESTINATION

God spoke of a new creation to the prophet Isaiah:

*“For behold, I create new heavens
and a new earth;
And the former shall not be
remembered or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever in
what I create;
For behold, I create Jerusalem as a
rejoicing,
And her people a joy.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
And joy in My people;
The voice of weeping shall no longer
be heard in her,
Nor the voice of crying.
No more shall an infant from there*

*live but a few days,
Nor an old man who has not fulfilled
his days;
For the child shall die one hundred
years old,
But the sinner being one hundred
years old shall be accursed.
They shall build houses and inhabit
them;
They shall plant vineyards and eat
their fruit,
They shall not build and another
inhabit;
They shall not plant and another eat;
For as the days of a tree, so shall be
the days of My people,
And My elect shall long enjoy the
work of their hands.
They shall not labour in vain,
Nor bring forth children for trouble;*

*For they shall be the descendants of
the blessed of the LORD,
And their offspring with them.
It shall come to pass
That before they call, I will answer;
And while they are still speaking, I
will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed
together,
The lion shall eat straw like the ox,
And dust shall be the serpent’s food.
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all
My holy mountain,”
Says the LORD. (Isa 65:17–25)*

The glorious new creation described in this passage refers to the perfection of God’s mountain—the true church. In this perfect church, the members will rejoice in relying on God, and God will rejoice in His people’s care for the church. God’s people will have a new perspective on life: no longer is life short and miserable, but every moment is a welcome opportunity to serve and sacrifice to God. They will build up their faith and enjoy a life of faith, knowing their labor is not in vain. These members will serve God in truth and with a sincere heart; their children will follow and be blessed. God will be a Father to His people, knowing their needs before they even call out to Him.

May our one-hundred-year-old true church be unflagging in her march towards such perfection.

“ In this perfect church, the members will rejoice in relying on God, and God will rejoice in His people’s care for the church. God’s people will have a new perspective on life: no longer is life short and miserable, but every moment is a welcome opportunity to serve and sacrifice to God. ”

Derren Liang
Irvine, California, USA

Passing Down the Faith

IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A CHILD

As the proverb goes, “It takes a village to raise a child.” This expresses the received wisdom that parents will struggle to raise a child by themselves. But, beyond parental limitations, the proverb also implies that the whole community bears a responsibility towards a child. A child raised within a community to uphold its values will grow up to become a member of that community, thus ensuring the continuation of the community and its identity. But if a child is not nurtured as part of the community, he may go astray, or worse still, become a nuisance to that community. Similarly, within

“Within our spiritual community of the church, we have the responsibility to inculcate spiritual values in our children—to preserve and pass on our faith.”

our spiritual community of the church, we have the responsibility to inculcate spiritual values in our children—to preserve and pass on our faith.

The family is the foundation of the church, and the strength of the church depends on the bonds within every family. Therefore, building the church starts with building each family. This is not just about cultivating a happy family, but, rather, a blessed Christian family. In

secular society, each family follows the culture to which it belongs, but in the church, we follow the teachings of the Bible. However, we sometimes confuse the culture of the church with that of society. For example, in the United States, the state provides a child’s education, funded by taxes. Citizens can rest assured that paying their taxes will guarantee their children’s right to education. Regrettably, some brethren apply this concept to the



“Regardless of the effort invested into raising our children, we need God’s mercy. We must bring up our children in the faith—this is our duty—but the development of our children’s faith rests with God. Only the all-powerful God can change people’s hearts.”

church setting, thinking that their sole responsibility is to offer tithes so that the church can provide religious education and foster their children’s faith. This perspective, founded on societal norms, goes against what we learn from the Bible.

As the proverb we started with tells us, many resources are required to raise a child. Couples spend so much time and energy parenting that their lives revolve around their children. When it comes to instilling faith in our children, the church also puts in much effort. However, if religious education does not begin at home, then the church will struggle in this task. Indeed, parents cannot separate themselves from the village and its responsibility. They are the most important part of a child’s community, playing the pivotal role in a child’s upbringing and faith. If parents fulfill their duty, then the church can bridge the gaps. The church cannot replace the family in instituting religious education. Both parties share the responsibility of raising the children in the faith.

THE LORD WHO BUILDS THE HOUSE

*Unless the LORD builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it;
Unless the LORD guards the city,
The watchman stays awake in vain.”*
(Ps 127:1)

The psalmist focuses on building and guarding, which can be likened to establishing a person’s faith. In the context of a Christian family, to build a house is to build the faith of our next generation, and to guard the city is to watch over their faith. The psalmist also speaks of two types of strength: that of the builder and the watchman, and that of God. God’s strength is needed even while man discharges his duty. When man has worked to the best of his ability, God will fill in the gaps, to complete what man cannot do on his own.

In addition, regardless of the effort invested into raising our children, we need God’s mercy. We may plant and water, but God gives the increase. We must bring up our children in the faith—this is our duty—but the development of our children’s faith rests with God. Only the all-powerful God can change people’s hearts. As we rely on Him, we need to pray that He increases the faith of the next generation. We should intercede on their behalf, just as Job regularly offered burnt offerings for his children, in case they had “sinned and cursed God in their hearts” (Job 1:5b).

We also have the Bible as a guide to leading a godly life. God establishes all things, including family units. The Bible reveals the principles God has determined for His creation, but problems arise when men rebel against these principles. This is why

we see families breaking down. On the other hand, if we align ourselves to God’s principles, He will bless our family and shower His mercy on us.

AND THESE WORDS YOU SHALL TEACH TO YOUR CHILDREN

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Deut 6:4–9)

As part of tradition, devout Jews would memorize and recite these verses. Verse 4 starts with “Hear, O Israel”—*Israel*, meaning “Prince of God,” was the name God gave Jacob. Being a prince is glorious; what more a prince of God? We, as princes of God, have freely received this noble status and we must pass it on to the next generation. Today, many esteem their cultural heritage, and invest time and effort in passing it on to their children. Those residing outside their country of birth will teach their children their mother tongue and cultural practices. Likewise, we who hold the noble status of princes of God must esteem our spiritual identity. Our earthly cultural roots may be important to us, but the culture of our heavenly Father is even more precious.

The Bible describes three kinds

of inheritance: children, material possessions, and God Himself. Most of us desire to pass on to our children material security. We focus on their education and academic achievements, hoping they will have good careers and a high income. Understandably, most parents wish the best for their children: abundant material possessions, and comfortable lives without financial burdens. However, such possessions are not eternal. Only the unseen things of God are eternal. To receive God as an inheritance is to receive blessings on earth and eternal life, far exceeding the value material possessions could bring.

It is imperative we recalibrate our value system towards the things of God above. We may wish to give our children what people of this world deem as valuable; but more importantly, we must give them the best spiritual inheritance, that is, God Himself. At times, we may view this heavenly value system as beyond us, and irrelevant to our lives. But, actually, every decision we make reflects and reveals our

values for all to see, especially our children. For instance, should we enroll our children in extracurricular enrichment classes on the Sabbath? The Sabbath day is a day of rest and blessing from the Lord, a critical fact emphasized in religious education. But if we choose to enroll our children in such classes, our action advocates a value system that conflicts with biblical teaching. We have to align ourselves to the values of God, even in simple decisions, so we can demonstrate our beliefs and pass on the right values to our children.

BEING ROLE MODELS

There may come a time when our children no longer heed our words, leading us to conclude that our only recourse is to pray for them. However, Deuteronomy 6 tells us that the first step in educating our children is not with words, but with a lifestyle that demonstrates our love for God (Deut 6:5). This love we have for God must be manifested in action and become our way of life. In their formative years, children often imitate their parents. If we lead a

lifestyle of loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength, our children will most likely imitate us to do likewise. Therefore, we must live a life of faith, and show our children the practical aspects of our faith, daily. By demonstrating our faith to our children and testifying to them the wonderful blessings we receive from God, we will be setting a good example for them.

In Deuteronomy 6:7, we learn that we need to teach our children in our house, when we walk, when we lie down and when we rise up. This suggests spending time with them in order to have teaching opportunities. A child is blessed if he can have his mother or father by his side throughout the day. Although the family will have less income, the stay-at-home parent can channel his or her love and wisdom into raising the child. The Bible tells us that the hireling does not care for the sheep as the shepherd does. Likewise, a nanny is not an adequate substitute for a parent.

A critical and indispensable platform in every Christian family is family service. This service is a regular session where parents guide their children in Bible reading and lead them in home worship. In Paul's letters to Timothy, he refers to the younger man's early introduction to the faith:

[I thank God] when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also. (2 Tim 1:5)

...from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through





faith which is in Christ Jesus.

(2 Tim 3:15)

Timothy was a third-generation believer, and his mother taught him the Scriptures from an early age, establishing his life of faith. Similarly, if we set up a family service and take every opportunity to share our faith with our children, we can nurture their belief from a young age. Establishing a family service requires having a daily schedule of Bible reading and praying together as a family. By doing so, our children will develop a habit of cultivating themselves spiritually, so they can remain rooted in the faith as they become more independent. If the next generation recognizes the importance of reading the Bible, they will have God's word as a lamp to their feet and a light to their path. If they know how to pray on their own, God will strengthen and move them.

A CHRISTIAN HOME

Finally, in Deuteronomy 6:8–9, God says, “You shall bind [these words]

as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” We can interpret these verses as instructions to establish a good Christian environment for our children. Children are highly impressionable and the surroundings in which they grow up will influence their character. The environment should remain an important consideration even when they are choosing a university. Should they enroll in a liberal college that will challenge their religious values? Should they select a college that is far away from the nearest church? Consenting to these choices is like sending our children into the wilderness. Indeed, many seemingly strong youths have lost their faith because of their decision to study at such

colleges. As Christian parents, we must understand that the best university may not be the one that is highest ranked or the most prestigious, but the one where our child's faith can be strengthened.

In conclusion, we have to guide our children towards God, to plant the seed of faith in them, and to nurture that faith so that our God will become their God. As parents, we have received this inheritance, our children, from God. Hence, we have a responsibility towards our children and to God to ensure that we preserve them in the faith. It can be an uphill task for us to be like Christ, so that our children can imitate us. It may not be easy for them to see the goodness that our life of faith brings, and for us to pass on our faith to our children. However, let us remember that all things are possible through our Lord who strengthens us. May God's mercy continue to rain upon us so that we can instill this faith in our future generations.

“If we lead a lifestyle of loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength, our children will most likely imitate us to do likewise.”

Whom God Uses in His Ministry (Part 2)

Editor's note: In the first installment, published in Manna 81, we examined two characteristics that God seeks in those who serve Him: a surrendered heart and a rooted faith. In this concluding part, we will look at four more characteristics that God's servants should develop in order to be used by God more powerfully.

A MIND SET ON THINGS ABOVE

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. (Col 3:2)

The Living Bible version translates this verse as: "Let heaven fill your thoughts; don't spend your time worrying about things down here."¹

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“What and who are we praying for? How much time do we spend in prayer? Are our prayers set on God's work, or are they set on our material desires?”

As present-day Christians, we may be so caught up with the world that we spend our time, money, and energy on things that do not last, failing to take heed of Jesus' warning: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Mt 24:35).

We need to take stock of our life, and focus our energies on that which is everlasting—God's word. This is even more so for those of us who serve Him. God's servants should set their eyes and minds on

the eternal promises of God. Our daily activities should be centered on the knowledge that there is more to life than just the "here and now."

How wonderful it is when we can wake each morning, yearning to set our thoughts on heavenly things. No matter how busy the day ahead, we will pray to God and affirm this longing. This is how we can start to fill our lives with eternal values, every moment of every day.



“God does not seek those with immense power, talent or wealth—He seeks those whose heart and faith are set on Him, and who never give up.”

Look Beyond Our Current Sufferings

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

Jesus was able to face the cross because He had set His mind on things above, and His eyes on the joy before Him. He looked beyond the pain and suffering He would experience at Calvary, focusing on the glory at the other side. Setting His mind on things above enabled Jesus to walk through His fiery trial.

With our hearts set on things above, we will be able to see the sins that entangle us and remove them from our path, so we can run unimpeded the race marked out for us. When our life on earth ends, we are destined for only one of two places: heaven or hell. Have we given this any thought? Are we resolved to make heaven our final resting place? How should we go about achieving this?

Pray for Our Father's Business, Not Our Own

Revelation 5:8 tells us that the prayers of the saints are collected in heaven, as golden bowls of incense. If we wish to set our minds on things above, we need to examine our prayers: What and who are we praying for? How much time do we spend in prayer? Are our prayers set on God's work, or are they set on our material desires? It may not

be wrong to pray for our physical needs, but God looks for those who seek His kingdom first.

A brother recently lost his job during the recession. Being his family's source of income, he prayed desperately for a new job. But during one prayer, God asked him, "What is your priority? Are you seeking Me, or a job?" The brother felt ashamed. He realized that, for many years, he had pursued after a good career and financial security, only attending church out of routine; Sabbath was not a delight. He had taken God for granted and had never truly sought Him. But God promises, "[Y]ou will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart" (Jer 29:13). And if you seek God's kingdom first, He will meet all your needs (Mt 6:33). So, in that prayer, the brother surrendered his heart and soul to the Lord.

Soon after, the brother attended a national adult theological seminar for the first time, and he sought the Lord. He was filled with the Holy Spirit in his prayers, and he was assured that God would take care of him. He then interceded for truth-seekers in church, brothers and sisters afflicted with illness, and those who had not attended church for a while. He had never prayed like this before—in the past, he had only prayed for his own needs. During that seminar, he realized that God was in full control of his future—he did not need to set his mind on praying for a job; he would now set his mind on praying for the matters of God.

The earliest words of Jesus recorded by the Bible are: "Why do you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Lk

2:49). Not many would have figured out their life's purpose at the age of twelve. But when Jesus took His final breath, He said, "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). Jesus had a clear purpose in life: His Father's business, which He fulfilled on the cross. Let us imitate His single-mindedness and set our minds on things above.

A PERSISTENT SPIRIT

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. (Gal 6:9)

It is easy to become discouraged when serving God. Sometimes, we even shorten our prayers because our mind is trying to solve a seemingly insurmountable problem. We fail to look towards the almighty power and mercy of the Lord.

God delights in those who persevere and are not easily discouraged from doing good. The Bible records some examples of promising individuals who gave up before completing their duty. In his letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul mentions Demas, who deserted him out of love for the world (2 Tim 4:10). Another disciple, John Mark, who left Paul and Barnabas while they were on a missionary trip, also failed to fulfill his duty at that time (Acts 15:37–39).

As long as a worker does not grow weary in doing good, then God will use him. We need to seek Him with determination in prayer.

Be Strengthened by God

God does not seek those with immense power, talent or wealth—He seeks those whose heart and faith are set on Him, and who never give up. What God puts upon you will never outweigh the strength He has put within you. We need to trust Him in this.

Why did God use Paul so mightily? What was the secret to Paul's effectiveness? Surely, it was because nothing could discourage him. In the midst of suffering, Paul writes:

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

(2 Cor 4:8–10)

Even when he did not know why he was suffering, Paul persisted. He remained resolute when faced with challenges because he carried Jesus' death in his own body—he always remembered Jesus' suffering—which impacted Paul's own life and servitude. This sensitivity towards Christ meant Paul could manifest Jesus in his life.

What does it take to discourage us today? Perhaps even a single negative word can cause us to give up serving the Lord. If this is so, we need to ask God to help us maintain a tender and compassionate heart when we face criticism. This can be difficult if we like to seek the praise and approval of others. There will be disagreements, and even resistance, when we work together for the Lord. And there will be times when we need to be steered back onto the correct path by our co-workers. So we must persevere in our work with an understanding heart towards others, and never stop cultivating the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our life.

We should never be brought to our knees by anything, except prayer. God does not seek extraordinary people—He seeks ordinary people who have the extraordinary capacity to spend time in supplication. An ordinary person can be filled with the Holy Spirit and become useful to God despite any difficulties, as long as he is persistent in prayer.

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 Jn 4:7–8)

There are some people in this world who yearn for love, who go through the week without experiencing even the slightest human touch. When we embrace each other as brothers and sisters, we are showing love, without judgment or criticism. It is a beautiful experience to enter a church filled with God's love, where brethren interact with each other as family members.

When we are busy with many duties at church, we may fail to show even simple gestures of love in our interactions with fellow members. We may lead countless Bible studies, and be able to recite many verses from the Bible. We may know how to defend our faith and win people to Christ. But if we do not have love, then we are like “a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1).

True Compassion is Vital

Let us ask ourselves: Do I really love my brothers and sisters? Do I really love those who have strayed? Can I love people like Christ did and look beyond their weaknesses?

To have sympathy for someone is to feel sorry that he is hurt; to have empathy is to actually feel his pain. But the Bible goes one step further: we are to have compassion, defined

as the desire to alleviate that person's pain. This means praying with them, comforting them, supporting them and spending time with them. In short, we go the extra mile to help them. If we study the life of Christ, we can see that He was filled with compassion. He was regularly moved to heal, to comfort and to teach the masses. He even went all the way to the cross to save sinners.

The latter part of Matthew 25 states that on the last day, we will be judged by how we have treated the hungry, the thirsty, the sick and the needy. It is easy to blame people for the circumstances they find themselves in and to tell them: “If you didn't do this or that, then you would have food to eat.” Likewise, it is easy to say to those in spiritual need: “You don't have enough faith; you don't have enough love; you must have sinned.” But does this really help them? Instead, we should try to stand with them and share their pain. We need to love each other in the family of God. And we need to bring others into this love—the sheep who are without a shepherd, those who are hurting and spiritually dying.

If we have unconditional love for others, then God will use us



“When we are praised for the work we do for God, we need to be careful not to let pride taint our once-pure motives.”

powerfully. He wants us to venture out and take His message to the world. He wants us to take up our cross. But we need to do all these with love. Even if we give all our possessions to the poor and are burned alive for preaching the gospel, if we do not love, then these sacrifices will come to nothing (1 Cor 13:3).

HOLINESS

*Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?
Or who may stand in His holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,
Nor sworn deceitfully. (Ps 24:3–4)*

This passage beautifully illustrates that a holy life starts with cleansing. Each morning, we should ask the Lord to convict us of our sins. If we confess our wrongs, as the Bible says, God “is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:9). When the Holy Spirit fills us, we naturally want to draw closer to God—to become holy. And this is the expected state for all servants of God.

Holiness was an important component for the Old Testament priests who served before the Lord. Aaron and his sons had to wash their hands and feet with water from the bronze basin before they entered the tabernacle or burned a sacrifice on the altar (Ex 30:17–21). This teaches us that we must cleanse ourselves before we come before the Lord—clean hands symbolize a clear conscience. We must confess our sins in prayer and ask for forgiveness each time we come to church, especially if we are a servant of the Lord.

The above psalm also speaks of the need to have a clean heart in our service, doing all things with pure motives. Looking at it from another angle: “Cursed is he who does the work of the Lord deceitfully” (Jer 48:10a). When we are praised for the work we do for God, we need to be careful not to let pride taint our once-pure motives. We should seek to please God over man, and never worry about who gets the credit for the work we complete. With such an attitude, we will be able to do more for the Lord.

CONCLUSION

In these two articles, we have looked at characteristics God seeks in His servants: a surrendered heart, a rooted faith, a mind set on things above, a persistent spirit, unconditional love, and holiness. But this is not an exhaustive list; learning how to serve the Lord and allowing Him to work through us is a life-long process.

As servants of God, let us honestly evaluate our faith: Do we set our mind on things above? Do we love without conditions? Let our prayer to Him be: “Dear Father, we want to be used by You. Please fill us with Your love. Fill and transform us with Your Spirit, so that we can serve You better through Your power. Amen.”

Charmian Chong
London, UK

Behind the Veil

*People always tell me: "Pour out your heart to God."
I don't know how—why—
I just tell Him what I want,
What I think He wants to hear.*

*And there is something not quite right.
A barrier between us makes me question:
"Does God really hear my prayers?
Is He really there?"*

*Yet life goes on,
The feelings of discomfort
Brushed under the carpet.
Surely all is well?*

Being honest with yourself is a hard thing to do.

*Then I am reminded of God's love,
How He made me His child
According to the good pleasure of His will.*

*He was so happy to come to earth for me
He was so glad to suffer on the cross for me
He wanted to bear my sins for me*

*"Think about His love."
How can anyone be worthy of this sacrifice?
Least of all
Me?*

*"Think about His love."
He already knows the person that I am.
I am the one who doesn't.*

*Who is this person He died for?
I must search myself to know
Who is this person God loves?
To know the extent of His love*

*His love opens my reluctant,
hardened heart.
Looking into myself, reflecting deeply
I see*

*Weaknesses I could not bring myself to admit
Even to myself,
Sins I convinced myself were nothing, not really sins.*

*And yet now it is so clear—
If being honest with yourself is hard
Being honest with God is even harder.
This hidden, unexpected truth
How can I come to Him so unworthy?
Unworthy of His love, His great sacrifice
And yet
It is in this love, this sacrifice, that I have faith.*

*He knew all along what I had hidden from myself
He knew and still He chose to suffer
For me*

*With boldness I must come
Before the High Priest
The throne of grace
To pour out what I have discovered deep
Within my heart
To admit the ugly truth
The truth He knew all along
Of who I really am*

*In prayer the veil is lifted
my heart poured out
like water before
the face of the Lord*

*every weakness
every insecurity
deep within me
exposed*

*but still the mercy of the Lord endures
from everlasting to everlasting
and I finally see how
His mercy
is as high as the heavens above
and why His unfailing compassions
seem new each morning*

*He knows more than any friend
He is nearer than any sister or brother
He knew from the start who I am
and now I know
I no longer need to pretend
for my closest Friend knows
the person behind the veil*

Call for Articles

Articles due:
January 31, 2018

Issue #86: Go and Make Disciples of All Nations

Continuing with the True Jesus Church centennial series, this issue of Manna focuses on evangelism. Having reflected upon and reaffirmed our identity as the true church of God, and having renewed our zeal to press onwards and upwards in our faith, we now examine one of the two commissions tasked to the church by the Lord Jesus:

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

The evangelistic mission to preach Jesus’ message and save souls is central to the church’s purpose on earth. Globally, we have made many inroads in preaching to Chinese and English-speaking populations, but as the

church of all nations, we need to break through the barriers to preach to people of every nation and tongue. Each and every member should pray for the global growth of the gospel, so that one day we will be part of that great multitude made up of people from “all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues” (Rev 7:9).

So, are we ever ready to preach the gospel to every soul? How should we, as a church and as individuals, evangelize in the digital, hyper-connected age? What cultural and socioeconomic factors are holding us back from sharing the complete gospel to the unenlightened, both in places where the church has been established, and in areas we have yet to reach? And, according to biblical prophecy, how will the borders of the church expand to encompass all nations, as well as the return of the Jewish remnant (Rom 9–11) to God’s fold?

General Writing Guidelines

Content

- Content should be biblically sound and adhere to biblical principles.
- The 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.
- Do not plagiarize the work of other writers or institutions, published either in print or online. Any quotations, ideas, or concepts taken from other sources must be properly referenced.

Grammar/Style

- Use active instead of passive voice.
- Write concisely.
- Use concrete words and ideas instead of abstract concepts.
- Use “plain English” instead of obscure, academic language.
- Use the NKJV version when quoting Bible verses.
- Use American spelling, if possible, in print or online.

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Please email articles as Microsoft Word documents to manna@tjc.org
Please direct any questions to manna@tjc.org or Fax: +1-562-402-3190
In your submission, please include your name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number even if you wish to remain anonymous.

Manna only accepts submissions written by True Jesus Church members. 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?

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.



Holy Spirit

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



Foot Washing

The sacrament of foot washing 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 foot washing may be practiced whenever it 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 in 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.



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.



Baptism

Water baptism is the sacrament for the remission of sins for regeneration. The baptism must take place in natural living water, such as a river, sea, or spring. The baptist, who already has received baptisms 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 down.



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.



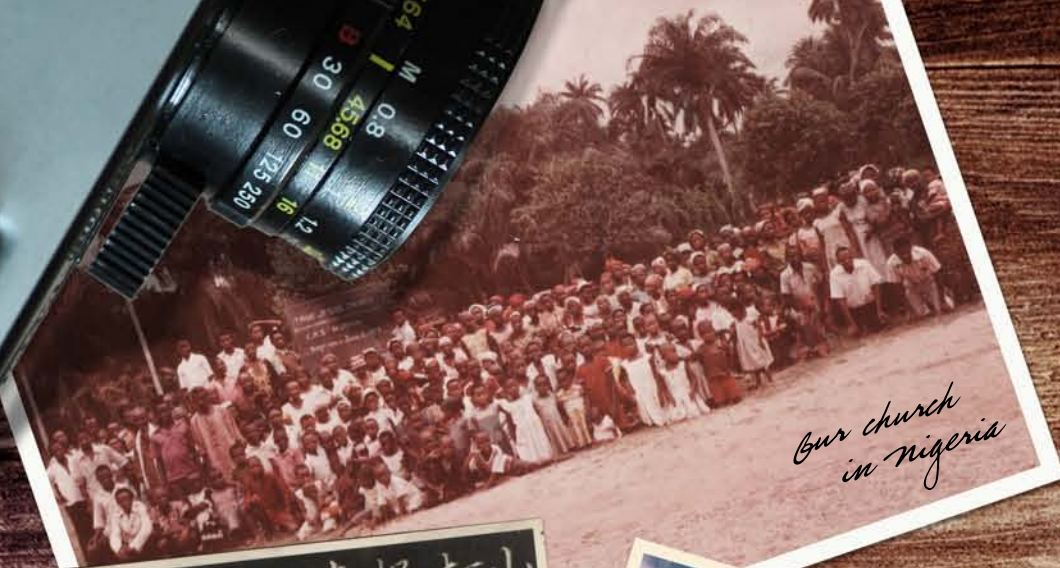
Sabbath Day

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.



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.



*Our church
in Nigeria*



Sandakan, Sabah



*Honolulu
Hawaii*



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